UNCHARTED 4 NEXT-GEN NATHAN DRAKE ARRIVES

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Where does your favourite rank in our list?

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Shinji Mikami on creating fear

THE YEAR OF PS4
Sony reveals the secrets behind its comeback

RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER
Inside Lara's darkest adventure yet

ASSASSIN'S CREED LEADS BIG GAMES SPECIAL

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ISSUE 150

HIGHLIGHTS
RAINBOW SIX: SIEGE ■ LITTLEBIGPLANET 3 ■ MASS EFFECT 4 ■ BLOODBORNE
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And... relax. There was much panic after PS4 and Xbox One launched to much fanfare when an awkward silence followed, as everyone looked at each other and wondered where are the actual games? Even Wii U seemed to be caught up in the malaise, despite the significant headstart over its console rivals.

But at long last, games are on the way and they're arriving in all sorts of shapes and sizes – *Rainbow Six: Siege*, *Grim Fandango*, *Crackdown*, *Mario Maker*, *Dead Island 2*, *Cuphead*, *Splatoon*, *Rise Of The Tomb Raider*, *Scalebound* and so on. You'll likely have your favourites. Mine, bizarrely, are *Mortal Kombat X* and *Captain Toad: Treasure Tracker*. Figure that one out.

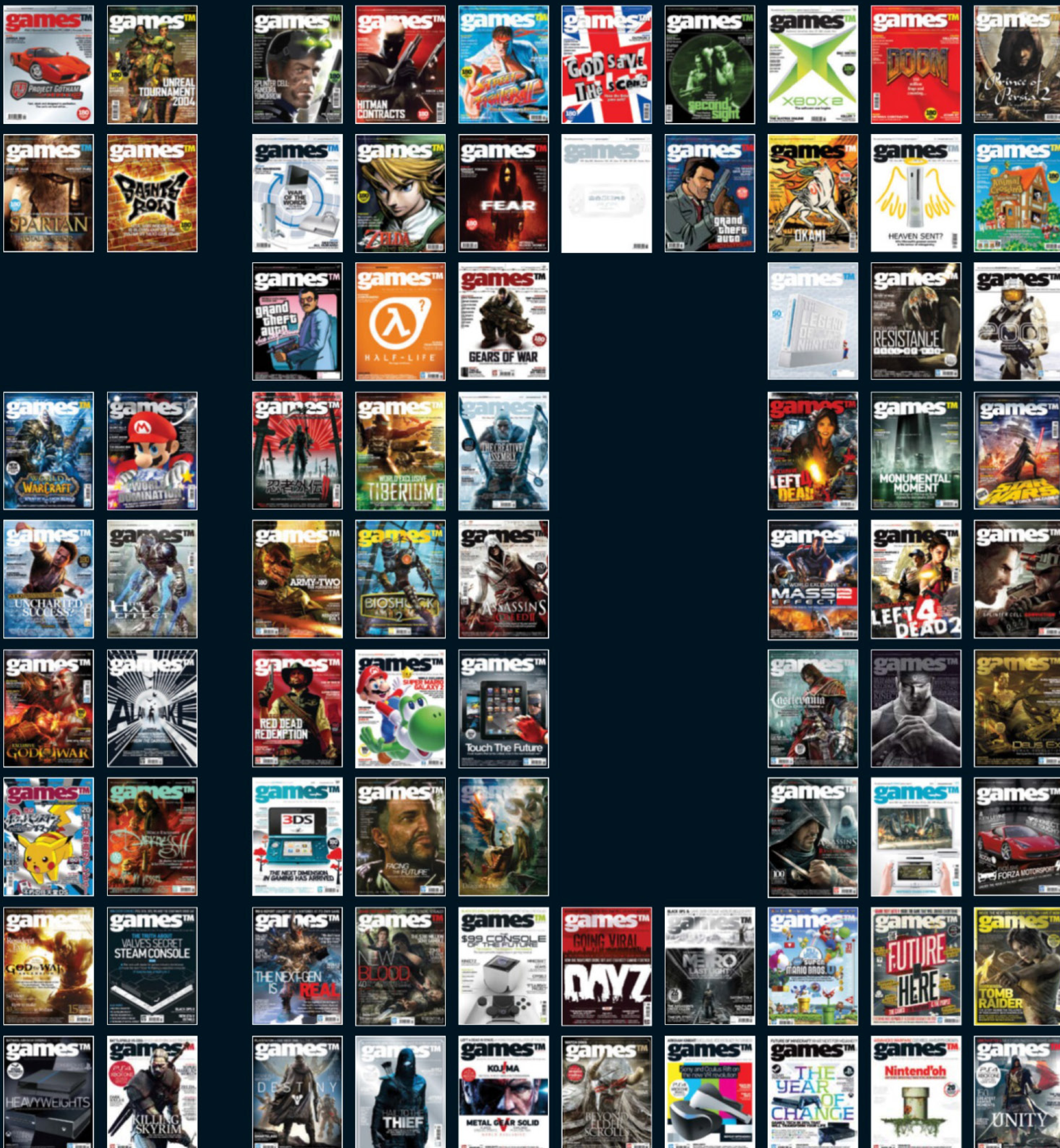
Assassin's Creed Unity is our cover game this month, as it's finally seeing the series throwing off its last-gen shackles and taking advantage of what the new consoles have to offer. On the surface, there are four player co-op and lush visuals that will prompt over-the-top superlatives beneath now and release, but we've gone deeper than that for our extensive look at *Unity*, chatting to the senior producer about what we can expect from the impressive game.

And even if *Unity* doesn't quite work out like we hope it will, then hey – there's always Sub-Zero and Toad to look forward to, right?

Ryan King
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF




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DEVIL MAY CRY 2
KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC
ZELDA
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HALO 2
PRINCE OF PERSIA
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THIS TIME IT'S WAR
METAL GEAR SOLID 3
NINTENDO DS
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OUTRUN 2006
STEP INTO THE LITE
KILLER CAPCOM
REVOLUTION
FORZA 2
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All Sewn Up?
GRAND THEFT AUTO IV
ARMY OF TWO
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CALL OF DUTY
HALO WARS
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PS4
ASSASSIN'S CREED IV BLACK FLAG
BATTLEFIELD 4
XBOX ONE
PS4 WINS
GOTHAM CITY HELL
REVOLUTION BEGUN
ZELDA



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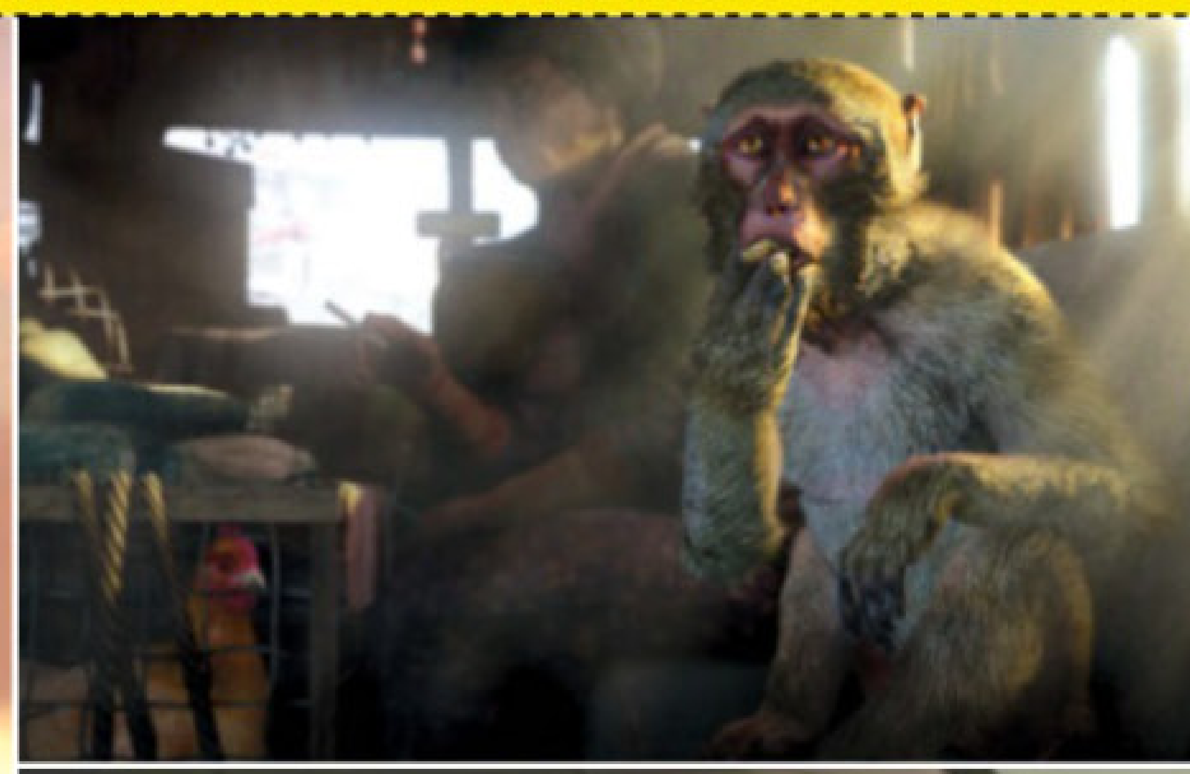
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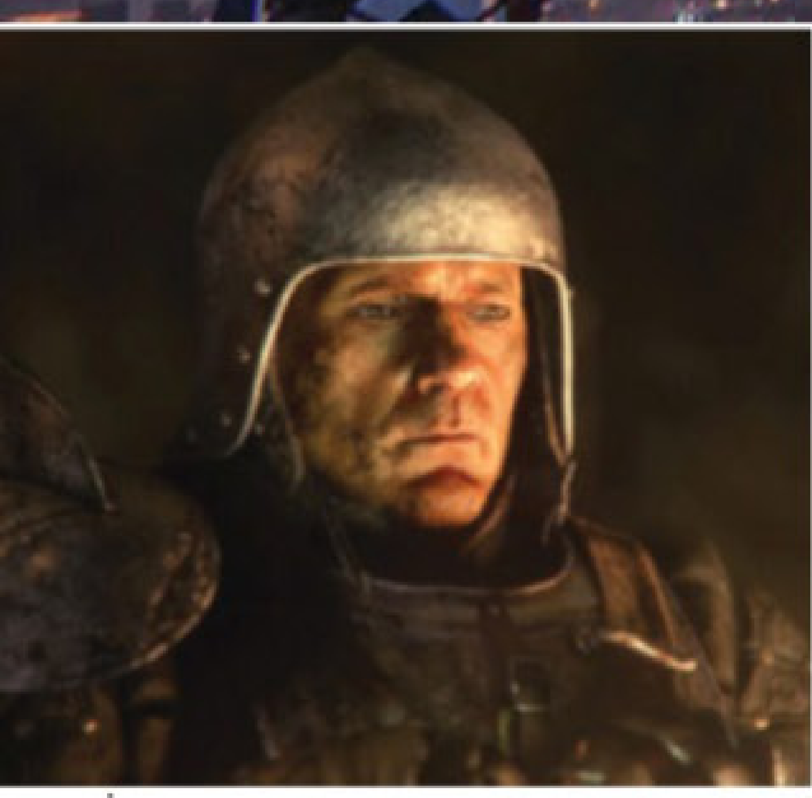
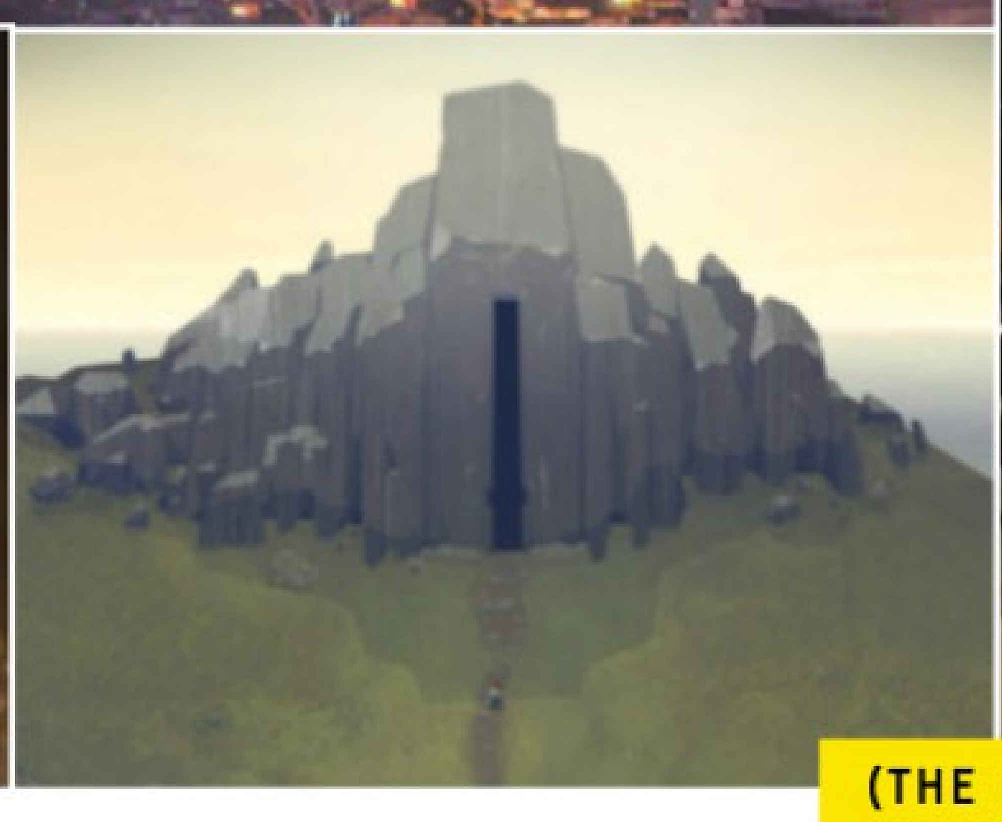
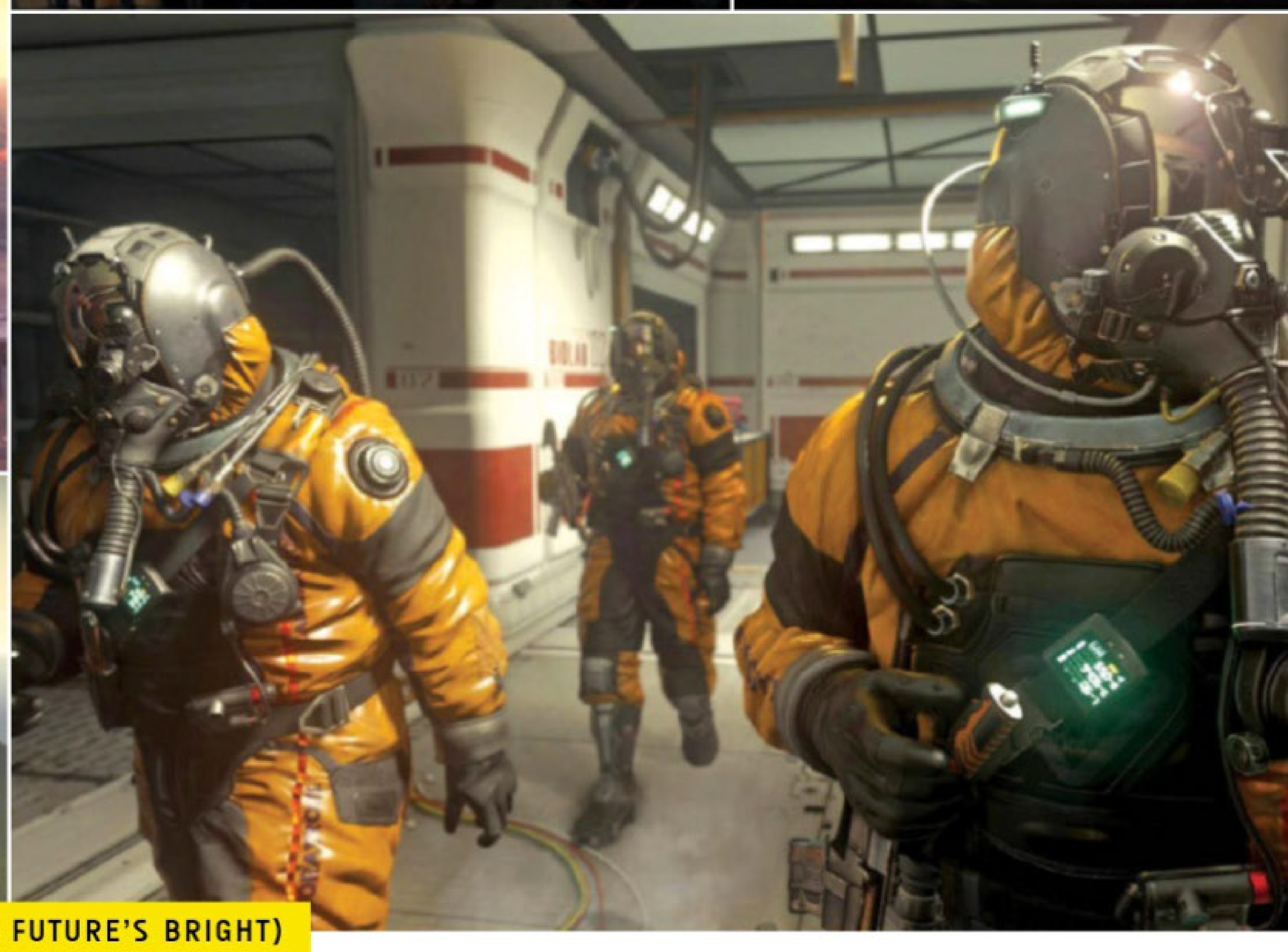
The New Age Of Gaming Is Here

The new generation is here, and we look at the biggest and best games due for release in the coming months

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Discuss

(THE FUTURE'S BRIGHT)

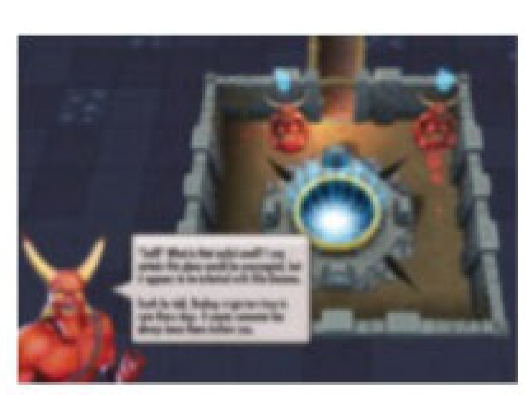
Why 2015 Could Be The Best Year For Gaming

→ After a slow start, things are looking up for console gaming; both hardware manufacturers and third-party developers and publishers are looking to push the new tech as far as it can go

The games industry has been a little slow-moving this year – since the launch of the PlayStation 4 and the Xbox One, there's been a little jostling between the big dogs of Sony and Microsoft (with the biggest releases seeing multiplatform launches, *Titanfall* aside), but ultimately the industry has been stuck in a perpetual state of 'pending'. *Watch Dogs* was the last 'big' release we had, and by the time Ubisoft had eventually gotten around to releasing it, the hype it had worked so hard to gestate last year had withered.

Luckily, we've recently had E3 – which saw the year punctuated with a glut of exciting new games, tech, exclusives and more. We've also got Gamescom, which promises more announcements and information, and perhaps even that long-rumoured Bethesda announcement we've been waiting on for a few years. On top of that, we've got the first commercial attempt at virtual reality in decades hitting the shelves at the end of the year, a new service in Sony's PlayStation TV, and a freshly revitalised Wii U barging back onto the scene to reclaim its family-friendly throne. Between VR, cross-media gaming and a renewed effort from Nintendo, it's looking likely that next year will see some of the most diverse, exciting and inventive content the industry has seen for years.

We're also seeing a delineation in the way publishers are thinking – EA, for example, has come under fire recently for the way it treats IP: the now infamous *Dungeon Keeper* release was ripped apart by critics and consumers at release, marked as a cynical



Above *Dungeon Keeper* just appeared to be a cynical cash-in attempt.

DATA STREAM → EA ANNOUNCED IT WILL NO LONGER BE FUNDING DEVELOPMENT FOR 3DS GAMES

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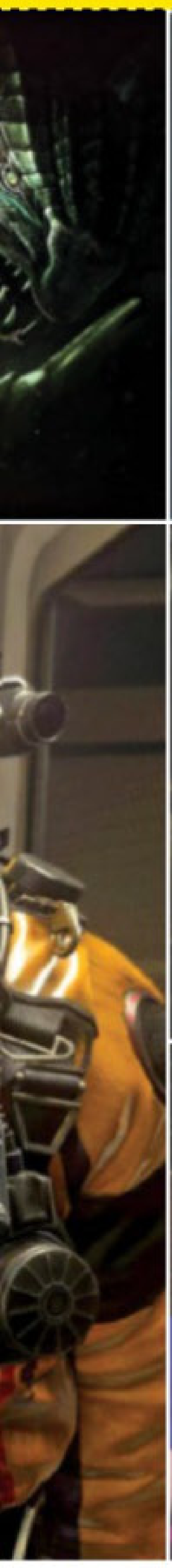
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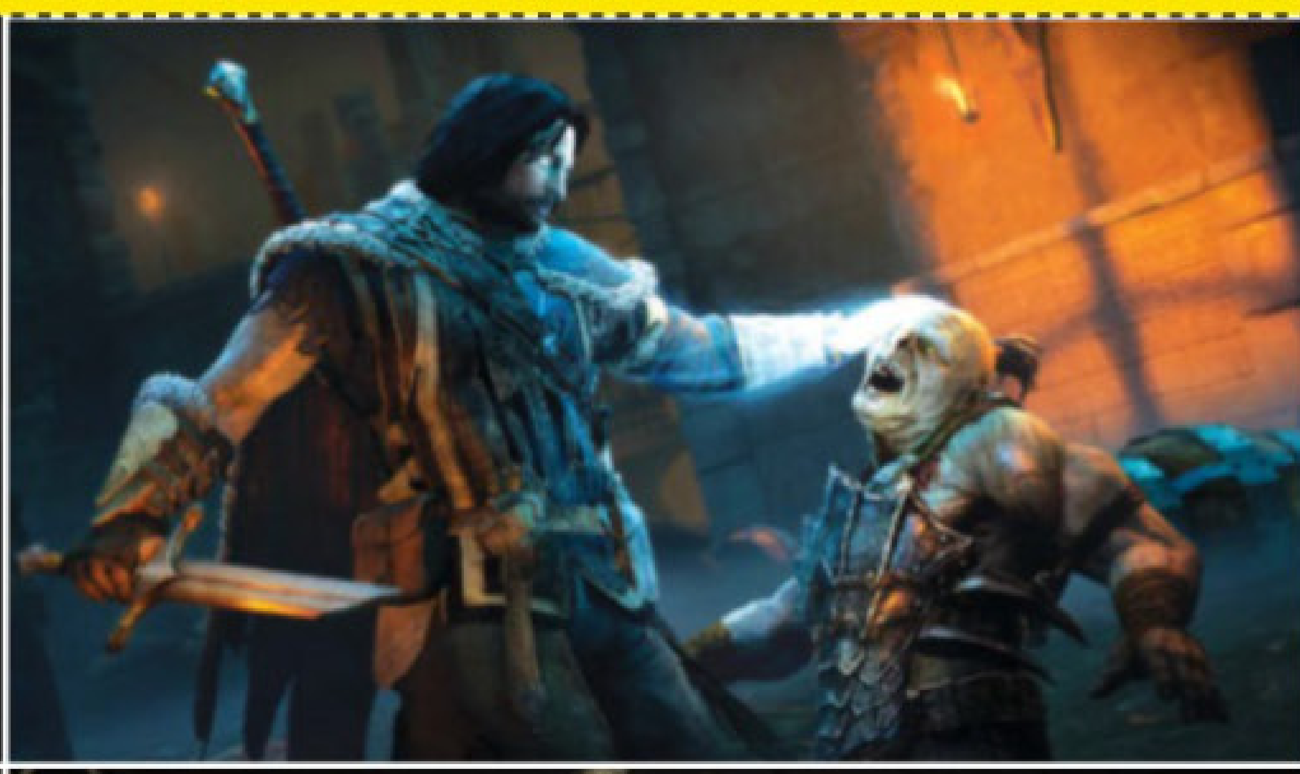
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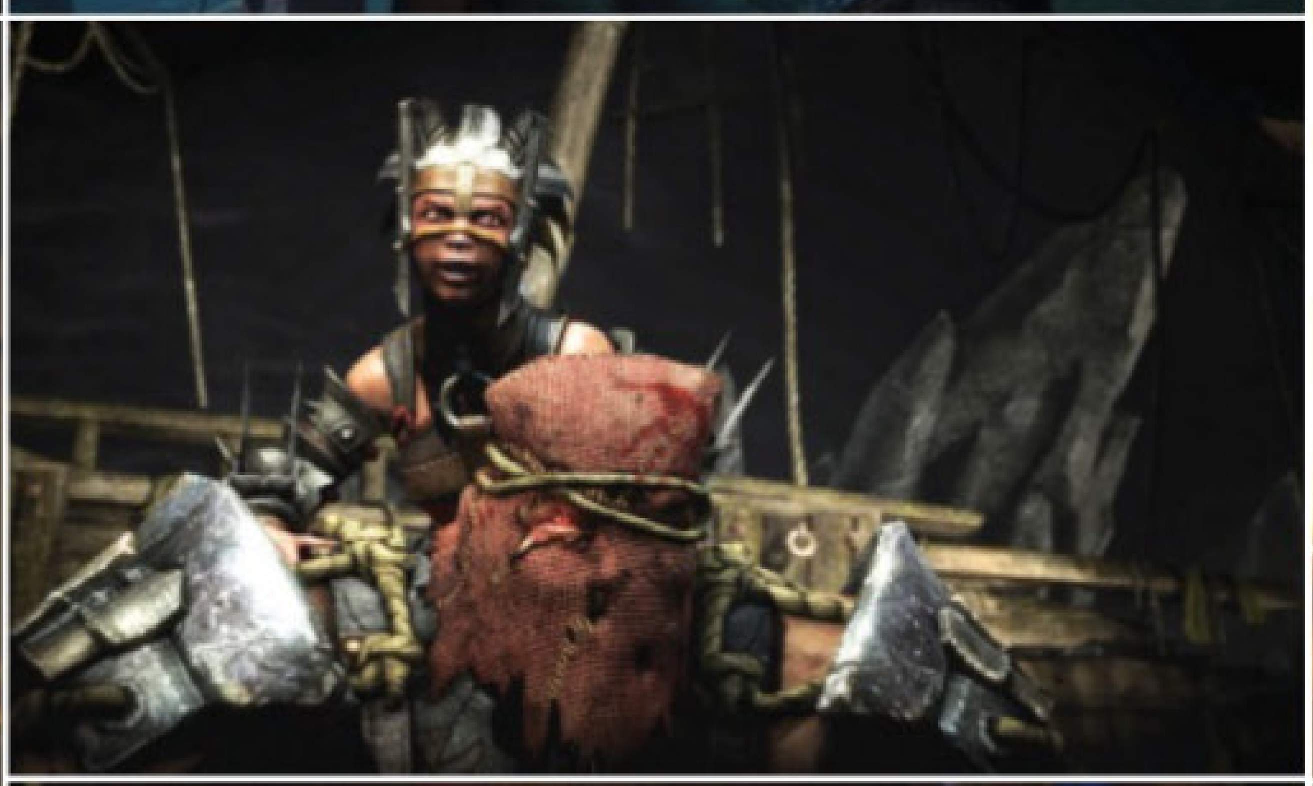
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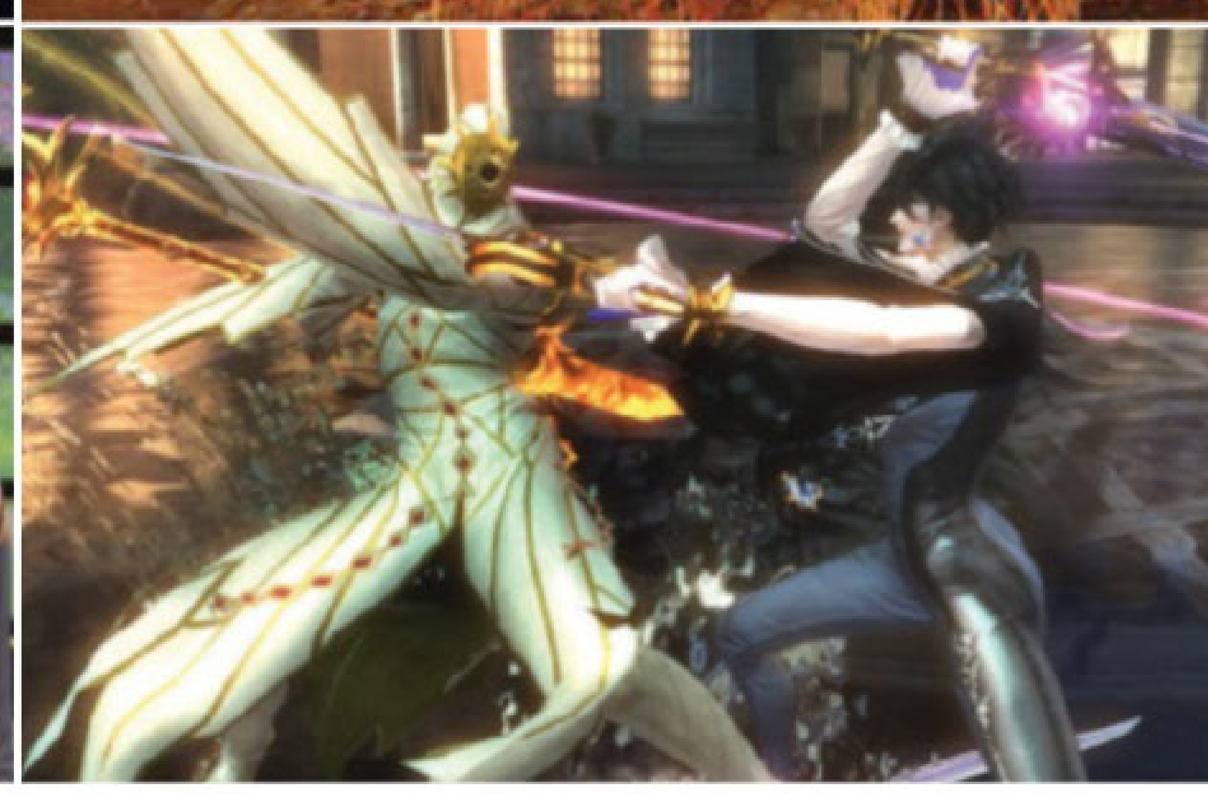












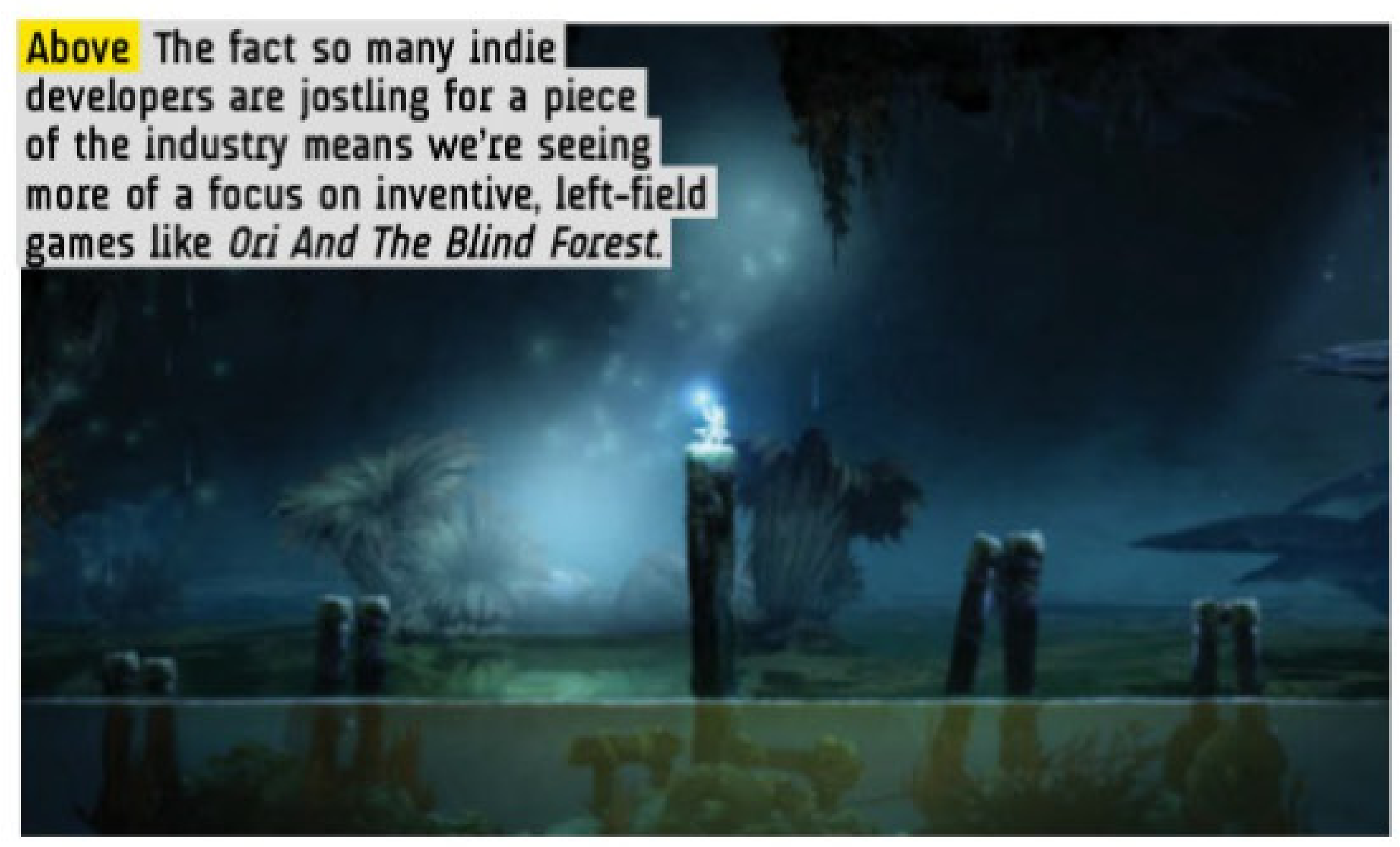


cash-grab by the publisher, and quoted as an insult to long-time fans of the series. EA has often kept quiet in the face of criticism, but recently, the publisher has apologised for its misdemeanours; stating it took a gamble that didn't pay off, that it misjudged its audience, and that its keen to get back on track in the future.

Microsoft, too, has made another U-turn with regards to the use of Kinect with the system: as of last month, you can buy Xbox One consoles without having to have Kinect bundled in with it. Coming in at $400 (or £349.99), the system is roughly £100 cheaper than its initial price, and as a result of dropping the camera, the system allows developers to take advantage of an extra 10% GPU performance (potentially allowing developers to catch up to Sony with that tricky 1080p issue). Microsoft was mocked for its constant U-turns, pre-launch, but in taking a brave step back and repealing the Kinect, the company has shown perceptive market awareness and rallied itself against the dominant Sony business strategy (which has always been more customer facing than Microsoft's).

Demonstrating a willingness to admit failure and actively work on re-strategising is a reassuring move from a publisher as big as EA. With vocal audiences on Twitter, Facebook and gaming forums, publishers and developers can now have a very open dialogue with their end-users, allowing for a fluid distribution-to-feedback cycle. It's making the speed and ease with which seemingly faceless corporations can reply to their audiences much more beneficial for both sides of the industry; one of reasons why this next year looks so promising for gamers.

Nintendo is a great example of this – recently the target of widespread industry scepticism, Nintendo totally won favour →



Above The fact so many indie developers are jostling for a piece of the industry means we're seeing more of a focus on inventive, left-field games like *Ori And The Blind Forest*.

> "The launch of the first dedicated gaming TV services will be the most notable step forward in gaming cross media we'll have witnessed for some time"

→ YAGER'S DEAD ISLAND 2 IS THE FIRST EVER GAME TO FEATURE A FULLY MOTION-CAPTURED CAT →

5 BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENTS OF THE LAST YEAR

While the next year looks like a true return to form for the gaming scene, the year that's just passed us by hasn't been too inspiring. We look back at the biggest disappointments of the current generation



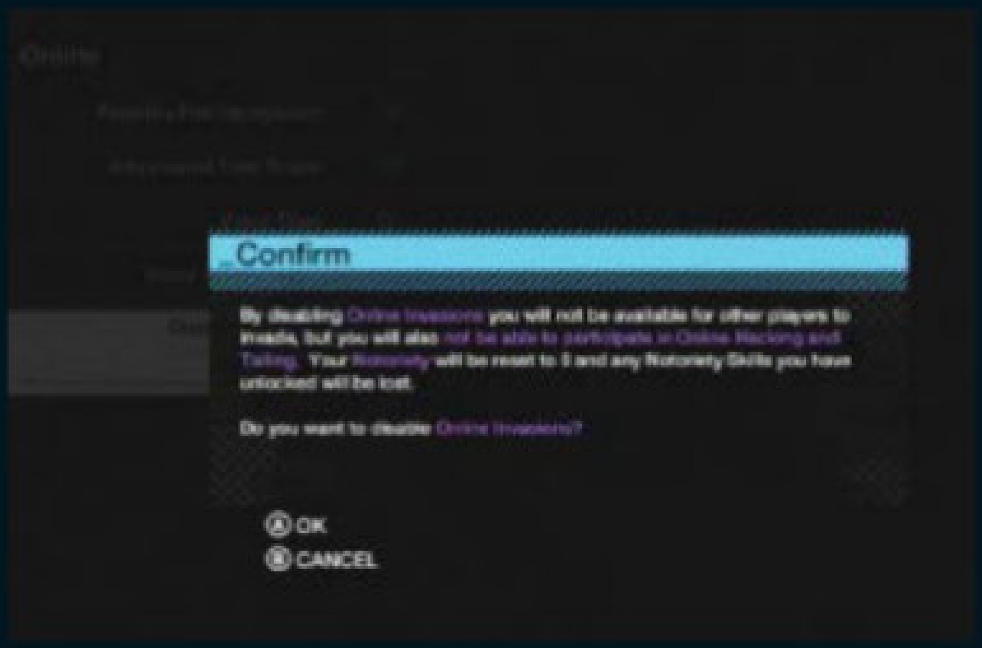
KINECT 2.0

MICROSOFT PROMISED A piece of hardware that would be like the original Kinect, but better; with more of a place in gaming as a whole, and legitimate uses in most exclusive titles… the very fact Microsoft has just dropped it speaks volumes, really. While the future may hold something interesting for Kinect (*Halo Wars 2*, anyone?) we're dubious we'll see support in many first- or third-party games, going forward.



PLAYSTATION 4 CAMERA

WHILE IT WAS never bigged up to the same degree as Kinect, we were expecting the PS4 Camera to at least be a little more than a gimmicky add-on for a few uninspired first-party releases. Considering the Camera wasn't part of the compulsory PS4 release, we're unlikely to see it used for much else, now… unless you want to make a real-life avatar for EA Sports games or something.



PC PORTS

ALTHOUGH THE NEW generation of consoles are effectively running on infrastructure similar to PC architecture, we're still seeing a slow output of PC releases – and if we *do* see them, they're usually swimming in DRM issues that make them unplayable (isn't that right, Ubisoft?) And to think; we thought that console tech being based on PC tech would be a good thing.



LACK OF 3DS GAMES

THE 3DS WAS kept afloat by *Pokémon X* and *Y*'s release last autumn, but aside from that, it's been a quiet year for the handheld, especially if you consider the popularity of games like *Animal Leaf: New Crossing* and *Fire Emblem: Awakening* just before this lull began. You'd have thought that with release of the 2DS last winter, Nintendo would've been keen to capitalise on the growing market, too…



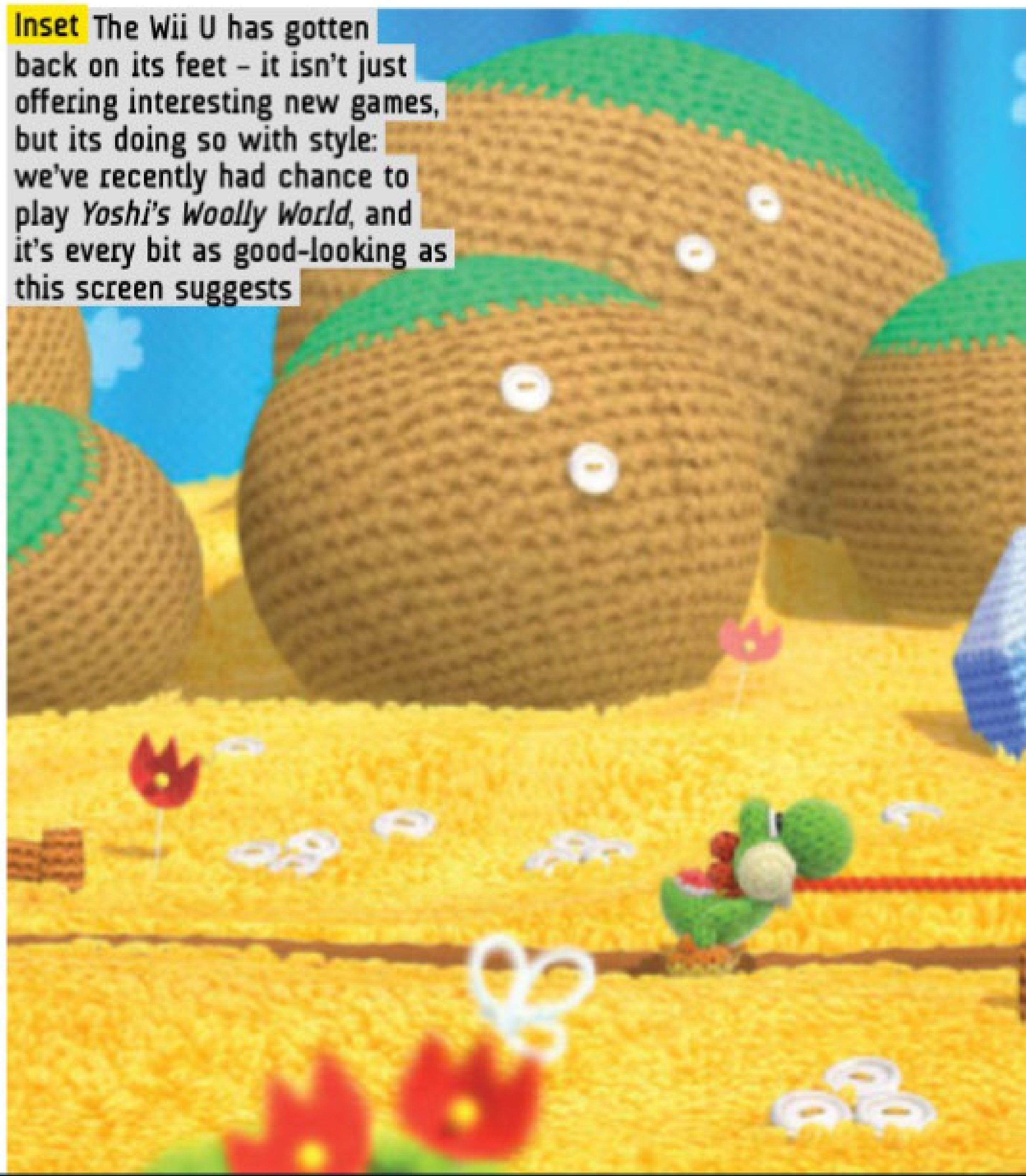
XBOX'S GAMES WITH GOLD

IT'S PICKED UP recently, but Microsoft's Games With Gold service was a consistent let-down in the months after its launch. While Sony managed to secure huge hits and cult classics, Microsoft managed to put out an embarrassing offer of first-party letdowns. We hope it's better, going forward.

with its Digital Event at this year's E3. In one day, the publisher/developer's fortunes were reversed: it seems eschewing a physical E3 showcase and instead focusing on the international audience and the demonstrably hands-on Nintendo Treehouse worked wonders for the hardware giant. A wide range of new first-party games, a move into the lucrative collectible figure market (established initially by *Skylanders* and Activision) and a genuine interest in delivering games that gamers want ticked all the right boxes for consumers worried that their Wii Us were looking worryingly underused.

Sony's Project Morpheus has yet to be granted even a release date, but already the VR headset is poaching a number of titles from the Oculus Rift – hardware that, this time last year, was unchallenged in the VR marketplace. Even Google is getting in on the VR action with its 'Cardboard' project – taking an interesting angle on the typically expensive tech by offering a cheap and cheerful alternative through a dedicated Android app. Having recently been purchased by Facebook, the Oculus Rift now has to double down and give gamers a VR experience unlike anything they've experienced before if it intends to keep the virtual reality monopoly it seemed to have before. Likewise, Sony needs to prove Morpheus isn't just an expensive gimmick (see: PlayStation Move, PlayStation EyeToy) if it's to prove that there's room in the industry for a living-room based VR headset.

Additionally, we're seeing the launch of the first dedicated gaming TV services in the upcoming year, the most notable step forward in gaming cross media we'll have witnessed



Inset The Wii U has gotten back on its feet – it isn't just offering interesting new games, but its doing so with style: we've recently had chance to play *Yoshi's Woolly World*, and it's every bit as good-looking as this screen suggests

MURDERED: SOUL SUSPECT DEVELOPER AIRTIGHT CLOSES DOWN SHORTLY AFTER GAME'S RELEASE



Inset *Quantum Break* is a fascinating proposition – a TV show that will have different scenes and stories depending on what you play in-game. It sounds like a mammoth undertaking, but if it works… it could revolutionise how we see games operating in cross-media.

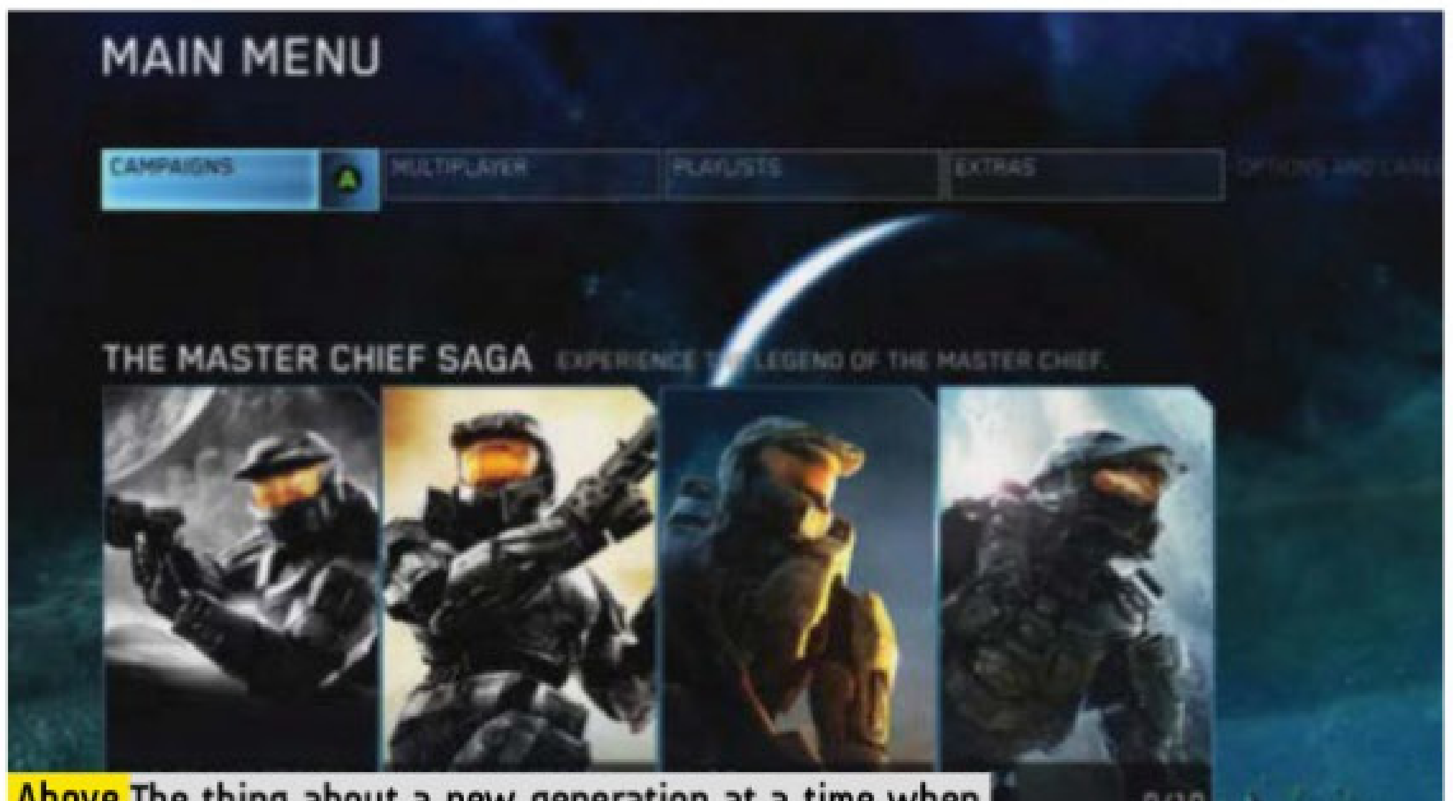
> "Demonstrating a willingness to admit failure and actively work on re-strategising is a reassuring move from a publisher as big as EA"

for some time. Between Microsoft's Halo 5 tie-in *Nightfall* (directly by Ridley Scott), the promised half-game, half-TV experience that will make up Microsoft's *Quantum Break* and PlayStation TV's premier with Brian Bendis' *Powers*, it looks like the future of gaming could truly lie in shared experiences. While the waters of this particular endeavour have already been tested with the *Defiance* tie-in (which, honestly, was a bit of a damp squib), here's hoping that with some serious budget and publisher input behind them, these new televisual efforts will be legitimate expansions of the gaming universe.

Third-party developers are also moving away from the cross-generational release system. While this means that those without PS4s or Xbox Ones will miss out on a few key games next year, it *does* mean developers now have the opportunity to not be hemmed in by the technological barriers that the previous generation of consoles offered. The result is clear in games like *Batman: Arkham Knight* or *Call Of Duty: Advanced Warfare* – the visuals and power of the games now allows us to truly experience what this new generation of gaming will feel like… and we're only a year or so into its release.

With Microsoft pulling Kinect and announcing a slew of platform-exclusive titles (*Sunset Overdrive, Crackdown, Halo 5: Guardians, Phantom Dust, Scalebound, Forza Horizon 2*) and the Nintendo rallying the Wii U with an incredible showcase of old classics and new IP (*Hyrule Warriors, Captain Toad: Treasure Tracker, Mario Maker, Star Fox, Xenoblade Chronicles X, Splatoon*) both companies are now offering a viable threat to Sony's dominance. That, though, is only good news for us as gamers; there's nothing like healthy competition to force businesses into offering something no-one else can, and if that means we see more unique ideas, more interesting concepts, more *games* as a result, everyone's a winner.





Above The thing about a new generation at a time when developers are keen to capitalise on their markets is that we get projects like *The Master Chief Collection*.

WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO

→ We took the time to ask you, our loyal readers, what your most anticipated gaming events of the upcoming year were; games, shows, tech, anything

@IAINOAKLEY I saw an m sprayed on a wall & if I tilt my head it looks like a 3 which means *Half-Life Episode 3*'s about to announced so that!

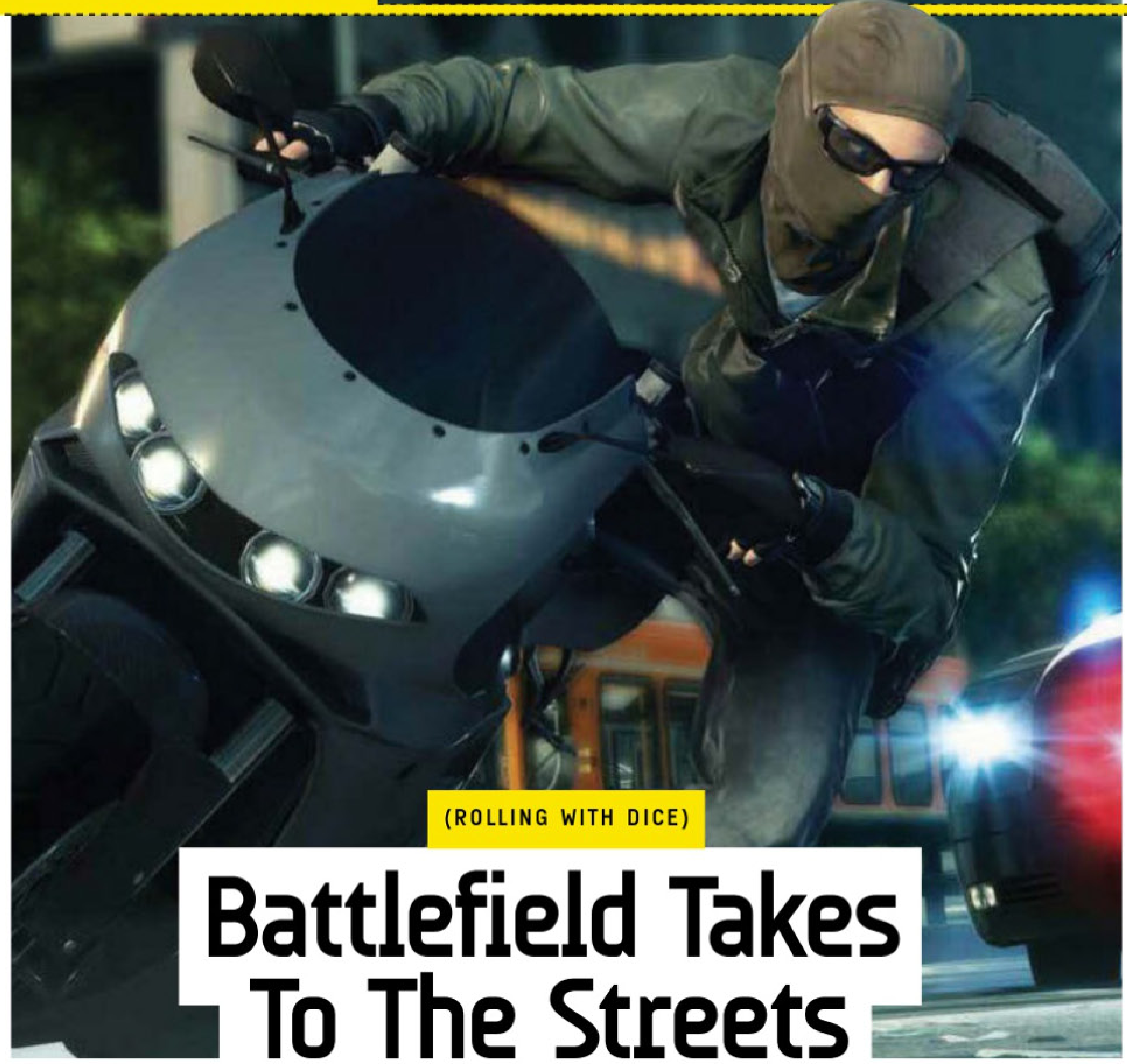
@GREATFANALYST *Quantum Break*. The creative genius Sam Lake innovating TV and a game at the same package: "no damsel in distress."

@MIDI2304 Having had a quick go of *Eve Valkyrie* on an Oculus Rift, it has to be the incoming VR revolution. A paradigm shift for gaming.

@CRIPLEH Hello Games' *No Man's Sky*, the game that's pretty much confirmed the PS4 as a purchase for me when the time comes.

@REDOFPAW VR, and all the wonderful, crazy possibilities. *Eve* and *Elite* of course, but *Lucky's Tail* might be something quite special.

→ SONY RELEASES UPDATE ALLOWING DUALSHOCK 4 TO BE USED WIRELESSLY WITH PS3 CONSOLES



(ROLLING WITH DICE)

Battlefield Takes To The Streets

→ With Battlefield: Hardline into its beta and Mirror's Edge 2 pending a release date any day now, we talk to Karl Magnus Troedsson – the group general manager for DICE and Visceral – about current and future projects

Can you talk about how you decided to shift the focus from modern military to cops and robbers in *Battlefield: Hardline* – doesn't it water down the IP?
When we think of *Battlefield*, we think of it as a series of core pillars – the big, open battles, strategy, team play, destruction, vehicles and infantry warfare. Somewhere along those pillars sits the core of the IP. When we mix those elements together it becomes a sandbox you can go into and have fun.

What we've done with that is that we introduced destruction with the first *Bad Company*, we introduced the word that everyone loves – Levolution – and if you hate that word, by all means write 'large scale dynamic events'.

So why the switch to urban combat?
We do see *Battlefield* as an ever-expanding franchise portfolio, but when someone comes up with a great idea for a great game and they have a talented and passionate team that want to build it, we just jump at it. This is basically what happened with *Hardline*.

When Steve [Papoutsis, executive producer at Visceral] and I met for the first time and the studio has said they wanted to make a *Battlefield* game, we started riffing on different ideas. The studio came back with the idea that they wanted to create a cop thriller.

Had they been watching a lot of Michael Mann at the time?
(Laughs) Well, I've said that in other interviews that I grew up in the Seventies and a lot of us are from that time. Crime fiction is still enormous; the TV that lots of us consume is about cops and criminals.





So when Visceral said it want to make a police and criminals *Battlefield*, we were absolutely on board. Not just because the series has moved in various directions before, but back in 2005/6 when *BF2* was out, there were ideas at DICE for a game just like this. There were even prototypes built for it. It didn't go anywhere because we didn't have a strong idea to pull it all together and we didn't have the team to develop it – the studio was working on other things at the time.

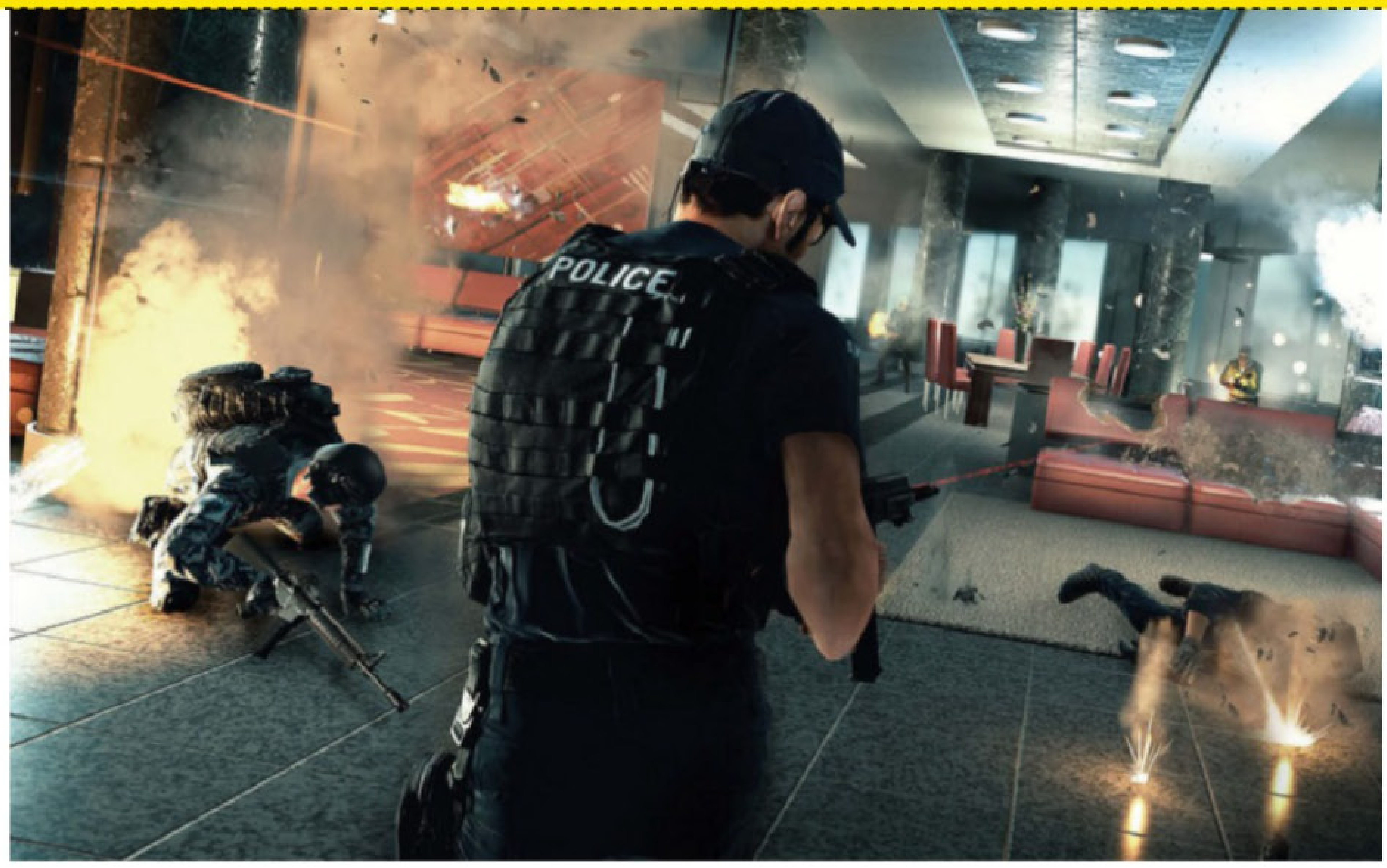
So when Visceral showed up with its concept we were like, 'yes! Finally! Let's do this!' It felt right. It felt in line with what a *Battlefield* game could be.

Is *Battlefield: Hardline* a sign that EA wants a new *Battlefield* in released every year? In much the same kind of way that *Call Of Duty* is?
Well, I would say it's not a business proposition that we're considering at the moment in terms of annualising the franchise. We can make great games as long as we have the ideas for them and great

Below *Dragon Age: Inquisition* and the next *Mass Effect* game are being built in Frostbite, with the releases hopefully proving it's more than a one-trick pony.



→ DOTA 2 TOURNAMENT PRIZE POOL REACHES $10 MILLION → THE LAST GUARDIAN 'STILL ALIVE' SAYS SONY



Above Despite *Battlefield 4*'s 'incomplete' release, DICE has promised to keep supporting the game, so players won't feel betrayed.

“We can make great games as long as we have the ideas for them and great teams to build them”

teams to build them. We're not deciding to annualise *Battlefield* first and then retrofitting from there. However, naturally there's a business part of what we're doing. We have to keep both sides in mind, but you lead with the creative and you lead with the passion. If you make a game every year and you make it successful, that's great for the financial bottom line. But that presents a lot of challenges. For example, not all of the *Battlefield 4* players are going to be done with the game they own. They aren't going to automatically jump over to *Hardline*. The family of developers will keep supporting *Battlefield 4* when *Hardline* comes out.

How far along is *Star Wars: Battlefront*?
While we *can* talk about it, we're playing our cards very close to our chest on this. We can't talk about how far development is.

What's it like dealing with the licence?
It's interesting because at DICE we probably wouldn't sign up for any IP that isn't our own. But when this chance came along… we'd heard that the deal had been signed between the two companies. We were immediately petulant: why was no one asking us to develop this game? I mean, hello! It's very close to the *Battlefield* formula because the original games took some cues from a few of the old *Battlefield* games.

So we started jumping up and down like obnoxious five-year-olds yelling 'Let us build the *Star Wars* game!' and my boss told me that it would be great if we could, but we simply didn't have a team. That's why we built a new DICE studio in L.A. We had a team in Stockholm that had been working on expansion packs for the *Battlefield* games. We allowed that team to become the *Star Wars: Battlefront* team.

How does it feel working on a game that took so many cues from your biggest IP?
Well, you know what they say – imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. It's almost like it's coming home. A lot of the fans were of the opinion that it was just about time that this happened.



Below Although Frostbite 3 has an evident focus on graphical fidelity, the engine has a refined back end making working on environment that bit easier.

Behind the Looking Glass

→ A lot of developers play it safe when they show gamers the first look at their games – they want to incite excitement, anticipation.

"In the case of *Mirror's Edge*, we won't allow it to come out before we feel we're ready to allow people to play it. But we still want to show you what we have. Is that a tease? (laughs) Yes, I guess so. But it's also a commitment. We're showing off *Mirror's Edge* because we're committed to building it.

Some of the stuff we showed at this E3 was a bit frightening because we're showing final polished software. A lot of teams and studios at E3 will make pre-rendered stuff because that's the only way you can be fully in control of what you're showing at the conference.

We went the other way with *Hardline*, though. If we want keep up an honest conversation with our audience, we have to open up a bit and dare to show our games before they're done."







Inset *Call Of Duty* operates in a very rigid template, but then it tops the chart every year it releases. A vocal minority of gamers offer dissent against this status quo though.

(OPINION)

New IPs Vs. Recurring Franchises: Who Wins?

→ This year's E3 saw the announcement of a new Battlefield game, a new Tomb Raider game, the tenth Mortal Kombat, the fourth Far Cry, the fifth Halo, a Crackdown reboot and – obviously – a new Call Of Duty. When will our reliance on established IP end and do we actually want it to?

This month has seen EA respond to reports that they were going to annualise the *Battlefield* franchise, cementing their Batman/Joker relationship with *Call Of Duty* as a year-on-year military FPS. EA has claimed that, contrary to popular belief, *Battlefield* is 'not necessarily' going to become a yearly franchise – despite numbered instalments now being augmented with side-entries like *Hardline*. However, the ultimate question is would it have been such a problem if EA and DICE did commit to once-a-year releases of the game, though?

We're getting a *Call Of Duty* per annum now, and even if you're not a fan of the franchise that prides itself on being the gaming equivalent of a Michael Bay film, it's easy enough to avoid. Yes, the marketing campaign may blanket the wider press for a month either side of the launch window, but that's the extent of how intrusive sequels have to be in your life. Just boot up *Valiant Hearts* or something, and ignore the TV completely for a bit.

Otherwise, we're in a pretty good position as an industry. E3 this year saw the launch of a veritable smorgasbord of fresh IP – from the grizzly gothic gore-fest that is *Bloodborne* to the colourful paintball/squid simulator *Splatoon*, there's something to cater for every gamer's taste. Even if the triple-A juggernauts aren't releasing anything that appeals to that refined niche you like to play in, an indie developer out there will have you covered. For all the malaise that's borne from players lamenting the announcement of the eighth mainline *Assassin's Creed* game, there's another sect of players celebrating the announcement of efforts like *Cuphead*, *Below*, *White Night* and *No Man's Sky*.

But the decision to travel the sequel isn't down to the individual developer. If you look at something like *GTA V* – a game that relied on the strength of its brand in the lead up to its release (think how few gameplay videos there were floating around before its launch) – the game made publisher Take-Two $1 billion in less than three days. Not only did *GTA V* henceforth make the publisher' pockets flush, but the re-ignition of brand identity drove consumers to the *GTA* back catalogue, and

Below A lot of gamers currently rely on the indie scene to satiate their hunger for new ideas and fresh IP.



→ STEAM SUMMER SALE HITS RECORD 8 MILLION SALES → CLIFF BLESZINSKI COMES OUT OF RETIREMENT



Inset Nintendo turned heads when it announced *Splatoon* – a very Nintendo approach to the FPS genre. It's industry-leading ideas like this that Nintendo built itself on.

> "The problem with developers squeezing out a new game every 12 months is that it could boil down to weaker products being released"

thus made the company an extra $113 million, 15 per cent of its total $767 net profit.

GTA is an extreme case within the industry, but with those numbers in mind, it's easy to see why publishers are so keen to push their developers to keep on milking those cash cows. Where some do it wrong (EA is the prime example, with its shameless exploitation of franchises like *Rollercoaster Tycoon* and *Dungeon Keeper*), others do it well – Ubisoft, for example, relies on series like *Splinter Cell*, *Far Cry* and *Assassin's Creed* to keep its profit margins up, allowing the publisher flexibility to fund projects like *Valiant Hearts* and *Child Of Light*; games that could be considered indie-like in their production philosophy.

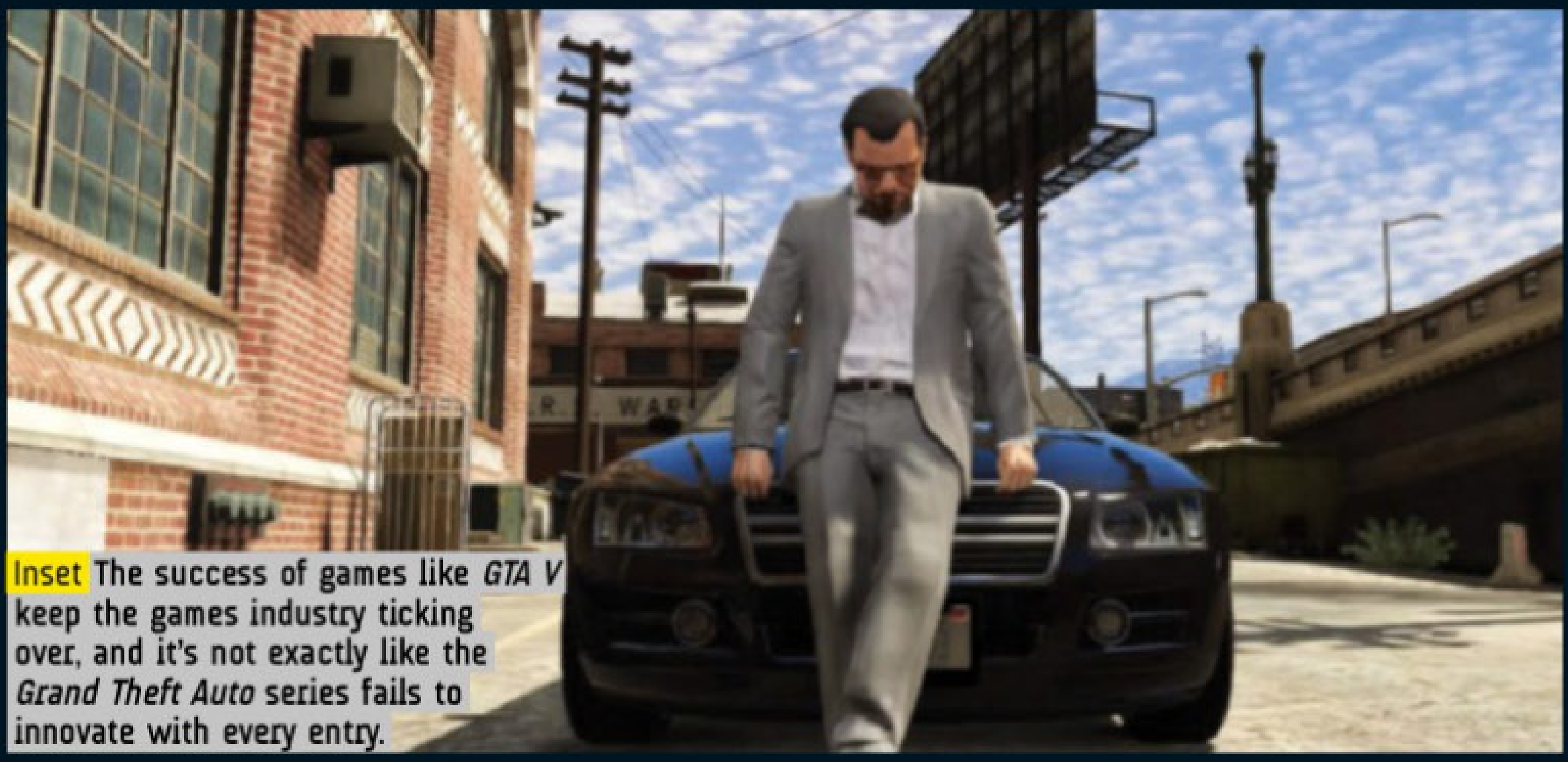
If this is a template we see imitated across the larger publishing houses – EA, Activision, Bethesda, Bandai Namco, Take-Two – then the profit margins from the cream of the crop at the top of the industry's monetary ladder could start supporting smaller development studios tied to the publishers under the same umbrella. We could see a resurrection of the double-A gaming scene, and cross-pollination of established indie developers willing to work under publishers hungry for fresh IP.

There's a balance you have to measure, though – the problem with developers squeezing out a new game every 12 months is that it could boil down to weaker products being released; take *Metal Gear Solid* – now in its fifth numbered release, the story (while well-written) is a garbled mess of nano-machines and plotholes, Kojima fighting against the corners he's backed himself into. *Halo* has the same problem – with Master Chief's arc now stripped down to a paper-thin story about Chief and Cortana, the world and universe almost inconsequentially fading into background noise.

Next time you see a publisher glibly announce its newest entry in a 20-year-old franchise, just remember that while that game may not be up your street, that's certainly not a bad thing – it might just end up funding the game you've been waiting to play for ten years. Take issue, though, if a franchise you adore is being sold down the river merely for a cynical cash-grab from a publisher desperate to syphon as much money from the IP as possible. You know, like *Spyro*.



Below *Final Fantasy VII: G-Bike* is a mini-game releasing on mobiles.



Inset The success of games like *GTA V* keep the games industry ticking over, and it's not exactly like the *Grand Theft Auto* series fails to innovate with every entry.

IP FREEDOM

→ Publishers are starting to get wise to how developers can use IP they sit on, and are instigating schemes to motivate such efforts:



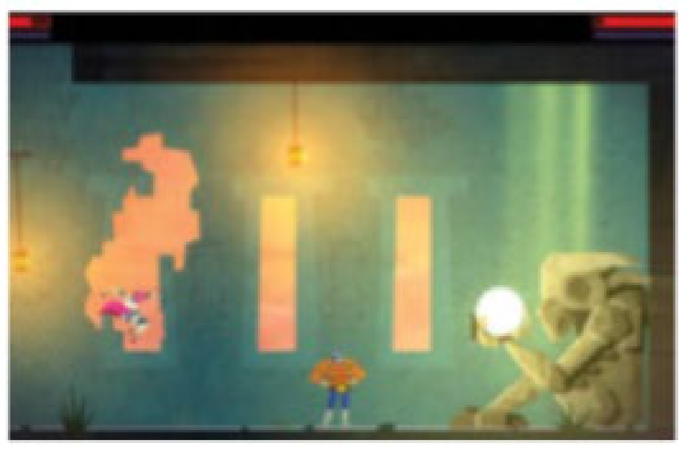
SEGA AND ATLUS

■ After recently acquiring Atlus, Sega has opened up all of the doors to its dusty franchises to the JRPG specialists, saying the developer may work with any dormant IP resting in the publisher's back catalogue – including *Sakura Wars*, *Jet Set Radio* and *Space Channel 5*. Considering Sega renewed the trademark for *Shenmue* recently, too, the likelihood of a *Shenmue* RPG developed by Atlus isn't impossible.



SQUARE ENIX COLLECTIVE

■ Square Enix recently set its Square Enix Collective service live – basically allowing public pitches for games based on any of the company-owned IP. The games have to be digital only, have a budget that is 'realistic' for crowdfunding and be developed for PC. So far, the only confirmed game is *World War Machine*, which is worked on by Tuque Games, but it could lead to some interesting projects…



PLAYSTATION PUB FUND

■ A little different from the rest of the collection we've amassed here, but PlayStation is taking its cues from the music industry when it comes to recruiting new IP: complete a project and pitch it to Sony, and they'll offer you an advance against royalties gained through the game's launch. *Guacamelee* (pictured) released through this method, and so did *Divekick*, as well as upcoming PS4 title *Primal Carnage Genesis*, from developers Lukewarm Media.



DOUBLE FINE'S AMNESIA FORTNIGHT

■ Once a year, Double Fine will take a break from its major project(s) and split into teams. These teams will have two weeks to come up with a game concept and a rough demo, with the process being totally open so the public can pitch in and even back various games – giving weight to the overall direction that Double Fine will take in the years to come. It's a creative and intuitive way of sounding out exactly what IP developers want to make, and exactly want the punters want to play.

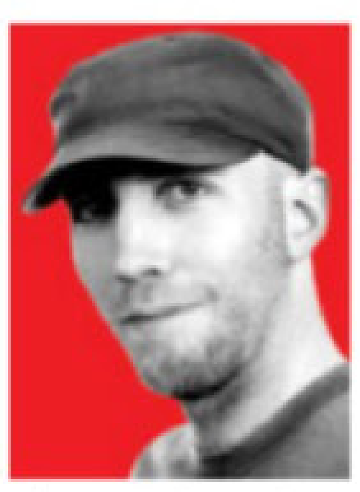
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KONGETSU

NOBODY IS THIS LUCKY

From Coding C-Lister To Development Darling: The Rise Of From Software



No wonder it has taken From Software three generations to rise from the ranks of the unknowns – the erratic studio somehow managed to have a dodgy RPG ready for the start of each of the last three console generations, with its output fluctuating wildly in quality between these milestones. Despite the odd whiff of greatness – be it from bonkers mecha shooter *Metal Wolf Chaos* where the US President goes on a one man war against terror or the rather more sedate card-based RPG fare of GameCube oddity *Lost Kingdoms*.

Looking at the studio's painfully prolific output (it shipped six games in 2006 alone, and a total of 41 titles across that decade) it's the mecha titles that were best received, but their niche appeal outside of Japan – even *in* Japan, to a lesser degree – would mean that few got to catch a glimpse of From Software's good side. Until quite recently, I was convinced that Demon's Souls was a great game by mistake. *Dark Souls* did a solid job of stabbing that notion dead and even though the team behind it moved on to start work on a new project, the From B-Team managed to do just as well with this year's follow-up.

And what was it that was keeping the main *Souls* team occupied? Why, *Bloodborne* of course, or *Project Beast* if you know the game better by its leaked working title. There are enough one-step-forward-two-steps-back decisions in both *Dark Souls* games to make me think there might still be something in my own conspiracy theory about From's accidental success. And the reason this scares me in the case of *Bloodborne* is that it doesn't look to be so much a *Souls* game as a

> Ability without reliability is worth little in the development world

return to the template of PSone precursor *Shadow Tower*, the kind of game that could be used to haunt From on some budget 'before they were famous' TV clip show. Yet here we all are, whooping with joy at the mere mention of a new From Software game and adding *Bloodborne* to our Most Wanted lists faster than a pre-order can be slapped on a new Platinum game. And perhaps that's the real problem here.

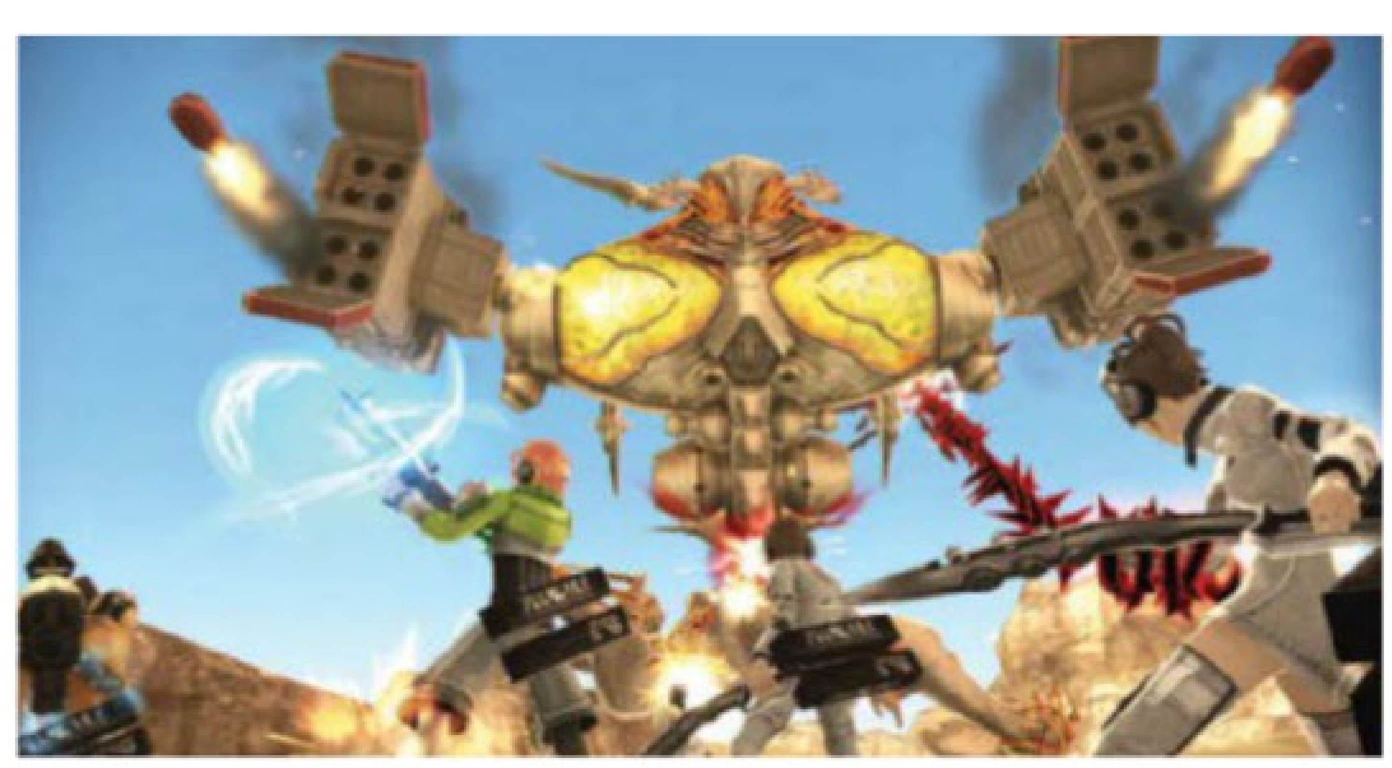
Perhaps it's simply the fact that there are far fewer reliable names in Japanese development these days and even a modest win streak can rocket a team to God Tier status. I'm pretty sure now that From isn't just lucking out time and time again. I'm pretty sure it has honed its craft over the years and finally settled on a formula that fully showcases the team's collective talent – in fact, Miyazaki's evident hand in this has seen him rise to president of the studio. And I'm looking forward to *Bloodborne* as much as the next person. I'm just unable to shake this air of anxiety around recklessly placing so much hope, so much faith and so much trust in the studio that turned out *Ninja Blade* – for the record, one of my favourite 6/10 games – just days before *Demon's Souls* catapulted it to the big time. Accidentally. Maybe. We'll see.

Luke Albigés is Deputy Editor of **Play** magazine, an avid collector of import oddities and was the first person outside From Software or Bandai Namco to finish Dark Souls II

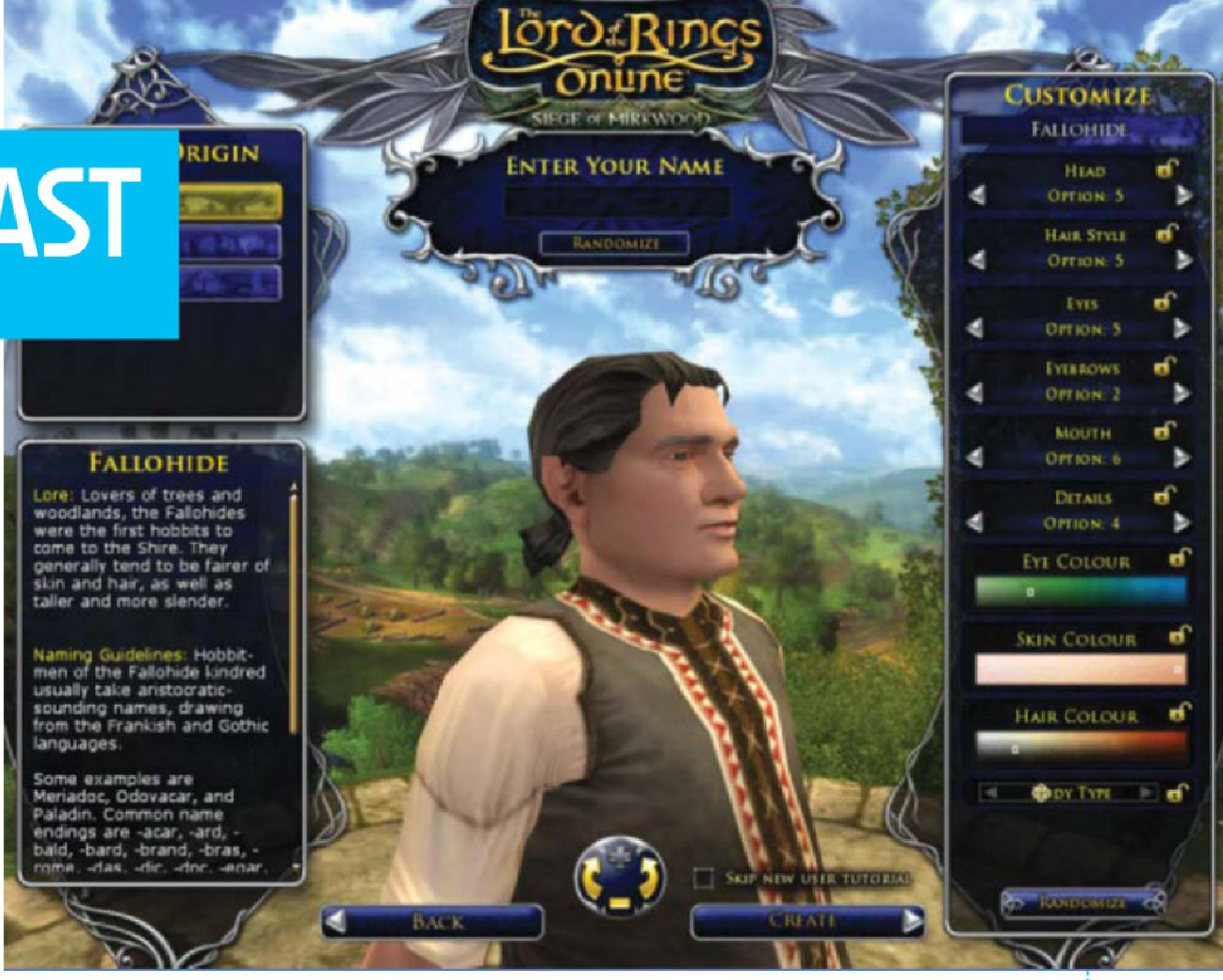
IMPORT WATCH

FREEDOM WARS
FORMAT: PS VITA

● With its lush anime visuals and with little in the way of competition, Sony's own take on the ever-popular co-op hunting genre has somehow become one of the star attractions in Vita's line-up this year. These games, while seemingly impenetrable without language knowledge, tend to use colour and icon coding for loot, gear and parts, so a decent memory and a companion guide are usually enough to get you by.



COAST TO COAST
with Gray Nicholson



The Gamers Behind The Names



The publication of the magazine's 150th issue reminds me that some things, even in the restless worlds of tech and entertainment, are persistent. The concept and execution proved strong enough to attain permanence amid rapid activity, like a building in one of those time-lapse videos of pedestrians rushing through a city. And at the top, one constant while the insides were refreshed every four weeks: the name, growing in weight and connotation to become something that looks the same but has gathered much since 2002.

We do this ourselves, too, pick names to represent us at the inception of new ventures, names that hopefully remain agreeable a decade or more afterwards: usernames. We know they've got to be good, because we judge others by them every day, like personalized license plates.

Players with a meaningless number at the end of their names are not trying and should not be taken seriously; they gave up at the first obstacle and chose the easiest way out. Only marginally superior are the birth year users. Next, those who couldn't get their choice until they put Xs around the ends as some kind of textual frame that is not pronounced. These



It's amazing to think about just how much you can glean from a username alone...

Two out of the three networks don't allow renaming. So, like all great works, a name just has to be brilliant, original and timeless. Jesus, the pressure

people like to riff on the word 'assassin.' They're trying to be fearsome and edgy – look at all those Xs! – but the real message is that the name they wanted was taken and they couldn't think of another one.

Brevity is valuable, as longer names have become necessary as subscriber numbers swelled over the years. A short name suggests you got in early, are an elder here, can be succinct. I began to feel a gentle pride, glancing at my five-character tag on Xbox Live, as time wore on and sightings of such concise titles became rare. And admiration if not jealousy of four-character tags like Justin Calvert's "Xboy".

But if you're just now joining an established service, with this latest generation flinging users this way and that to new homes across Live, PSN and occasionally the Nintendo Network, all the compact titles are gone. What do you do? You probably want to create something original, poetic, composed; witty perhaps, but not a crude gag that's going to wear out before your first pair of thumb sticks. With these one or two words that will represent you, what do you wish to portray? Power, skill, humor, intelligence, friendliness? You don't want to refer to a movie or character or celebrity that will seem desperately dated in five years, or personally unrepresentative at age 23 versus 18. Two out of the three networks don't allow renaming. So, like all great works, a name just has to be brilliant, original and timeless. Jesus, the pressure.

The criticism could be made that all this over-thought preparation has the same effect as crafting the perfect face for three hours before starting a first-person RPG, a time crime of which I am also guilty. It feels important because you're going to inhabit this person for a great deal of time, but then you barely see the fruits of all that slider tweaking. Your games will play the same, be bad or good based on their own merits, no matter what your name is. Striking the perfect balance of creativity and individuality will have the same effect on your next big game as if you were called Jimmy5616. Maybe those dim bulbs are having the most fun, the ones who just put any old shit in the sign-up box and get the games on.

When Google consumes us all, perhaps it will force real names on our gaming accounts, as it has done elsewhere, eradicating username indecision and some of the worst behavior in public sessions. Your username, in effect, chosen by your parents, years before you have any idea if you like its impact, symmetry, sound or what it says to the world about you. With the sort of idiots you meet nowadays approaching breeding age, maybe kids in the future will be named things like xXn00bASSASS1NXx.

Gray Nicholson is a former videogames journalist who now resides in America, acknowledging his roots as he sees fit



Five Things About

Kingdom Hearts HD 2.5 ReMix

The success of the first *Kingdom Hearts ReMix* made it inevitable that we'd see the rest of the expansive universe re-released. We sat down with the *ReMix*'s director, Tai Yasue, to talk about what the collection will bring to fans

1 It's being developed alongside *Kingdom Hearts 3*…

"We're creating *Kingdom Hearts 2.5* and *3* at the same time so I think it's a good way of relearning what was special about the series. There have been a lot of people added to our staff and I feel that this is a good learning process for them to go through. We respect each IP and we merge that with what is special about Square Enix, so there's the original part of *Kingdom Heart*s and the Disney part. It's not about changing that Disney world, it's about revisiting it and balancing the parts to maximise their effectiveness."

2 It's finally introducing the West to games only released in Japan…

"When we were first coming up with the development for *Kingdom Hearts 3*, it had been getting on for 12 years since the original game, so a lot of people hadn't experienced *Kingdom Hearts 1* and *2*, and *Birth By Sleep*. For them to gain an understanding of the *Kingdom Hearts* story we felt it was important for them to have that context. *2.5* has the original story of *Birth By Sleep*, which is like episode zero, so it's very important to the story."

3 It's introduces features cut from the original games…

"For players outside of Japan, the Final Mix elements that have been added are special and there's lots of new battles. In *Kingdom Hearts 2* you can fight with Lingering Will, one of the boss battles. He's an armoured character with a weapon that transforms and that's a special one for hardcore gamers. For *Birth By Sleep*, we have a new episode in a dark realm with its own boss battle – something we haven't introduced before outside of Japan."

4 It's the result of a close relationship between Square and Disney…

"We constantly send things back and forth to Disney and it seems to love *Kingdom Hearts* as much as we do, so the development process is a very close-knit one."

5 Feedback for the game will feed directly into *Kingdom Hearts III*…

"We've been thinking about how these episodes link to *Kingdom Hearts 3* and how we build up to that. There are the dynamic actions and diversity of play, and we want to maintain that but we'll also be listening to feedback on *2.5* from the fans and maybe factor that into *Kingdom Hearts 3*."

> "Disney seems to care about *Kingdom Hearts* as much as we do"



Back From The Dead

→ **There are a lot of casualties in the games industry; franchises come to life and enjoy great success, yet find themselves fading into obscurity as quickly as they rose from it. We took the opportunity this month to ask you, if you had all the time, budget and a team of crack IP-acquisition lawyers, what games you'd bring back from the dead, and why…**

■ *Splatterhouse*, but better than the 2009 one. It was okay, but *Splatterhouse* has the potential to be something huge. I would do a third-person adventure where the world has been taken over by the creatures. The mansion is a hub that links all the sections together like the original N64 *Turok* & huge maps to explore each as big as *Fallout 3*. However, you combine genres to remain faithful to the originals - it's a Survival Brawler. It's all about surviving in those hellish landscapes long enough to wipe out each master demon or collect strange artefacts while pummelling everything in sight. It also shouldn't hold your hand; it should be like *Dark Souls*.
Jordan Blake Cook, Facebook

■ Konami's *Knightmare* (*Part 2* in particular). *The Maze of Galious* is such an underrated classic. Konami had already perfected the 'Metroidvania' style before it became an actual genre. Sure, *La Mulana* is a wonderful homage, but I'd love to see the masters at Konami make another *Maze of Galious* epic. The *Rebirth* games on WiiWare more than prove that Konami is still capable of delivering the goods. Maybe if we all enter the Konami code simultaneously, we can make this happen! Up, up....
Peter Snoeren, Facebook

■ *Stubbs The Zombie*. There hasn't been a game since where you can play as a cigar-smoking zombie
Erik Andorfer, Facebook

■ *Vib Ribbon*, imagine the amazing graphical fidelity that could come with those white lines!
@JamesKnack, Twitter

■ *Megalomania*; the whole god sim thing hasn't really been done better since, certainly not with as much character and humour
@BedlingtonJamie, Twitter


■ It's time *Tenchu* came back. It's still the ultimate stealth game and the first game needs a lovely Vita revamping.
@Peoww, Twitter

■ *Power Stone*. No fighting game since has reinvented the genre in such a way since that game.
@wayne_emanuel, Twitter

■ *Jak And Daxter*. You know why.
@kerrblimey, Twitter



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“In the brief two or three years I hadn’t been paying attention to the industry it had gone from being a blue hedgehog running across the screen into Bond in 3D”

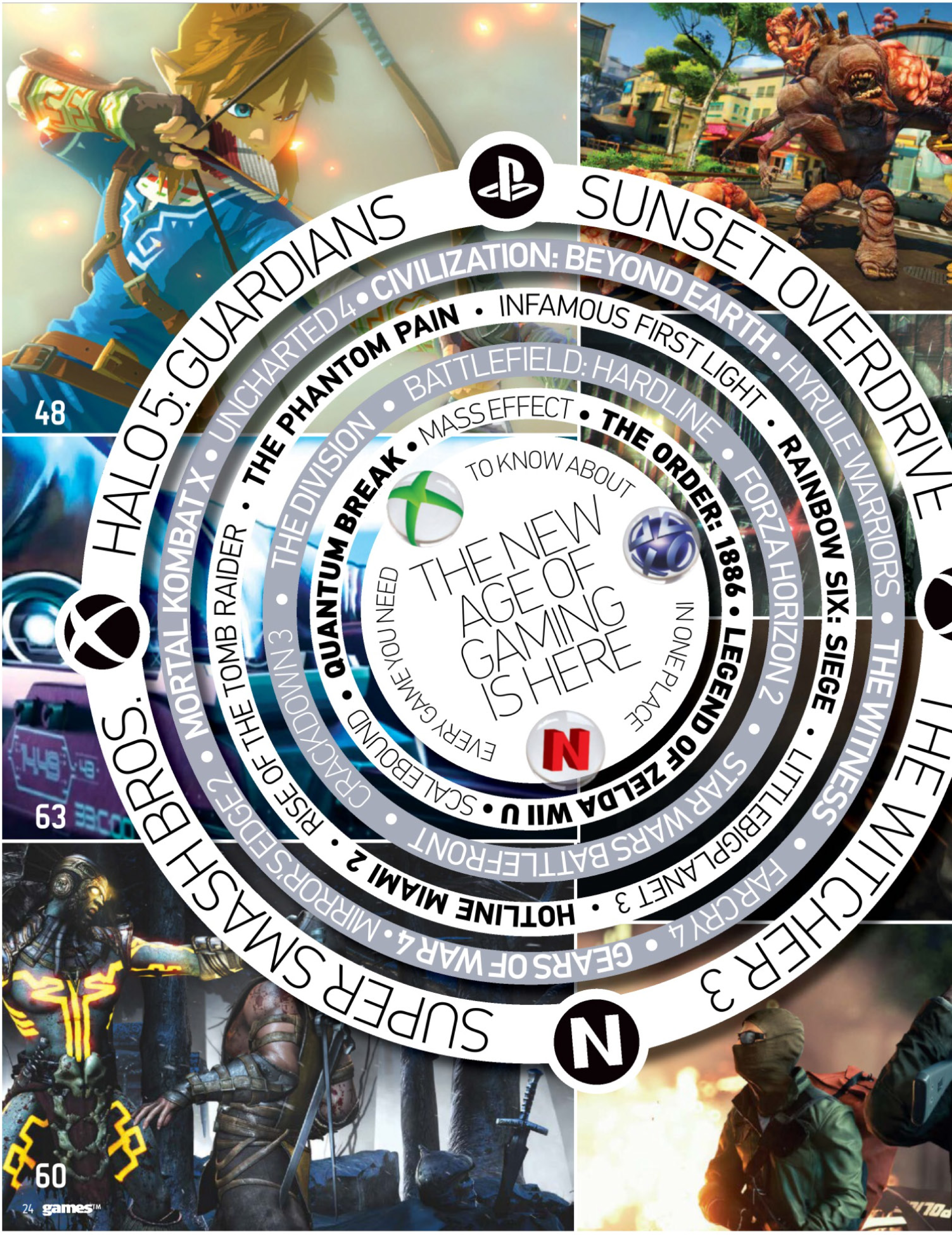
HUW BEYNON, GLOBAL BRAND MANAGER, DEEP SILVER



WHY I ♥…
GoldenEye 007

HUW BEYNON, GLOBAL BRAND MANAGER, DEEP SILVER

"The single most influential game for me was GoldenEye. *Someone showed me* GoldenEye *and in the brief two-or-three years I hadn't been paying attention to the industry it had gone from being a blue hedgehog running across the screen into Bond in 3D, climbing that sniper tower, having weapons and loads of objectives. It was unbelievable. It made me think it might be a fun industry to be involved in. Plus, just playing it at university in the classic split screen multiplayer, we were playing on a tiny 14-inch CRT and we made a screen divider out of cardboard that we Sellotaped to the screen to stop cheating."*



THE NEW AGE OF GAMING IS HERE

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THE PHANTOM PAIN • INFAMOUS FIRST LIGHT • RAINBOW SIX: SIEGE • LITTLEBIGPLANET 3 • HOTLINE MIAMI 2 • RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER •

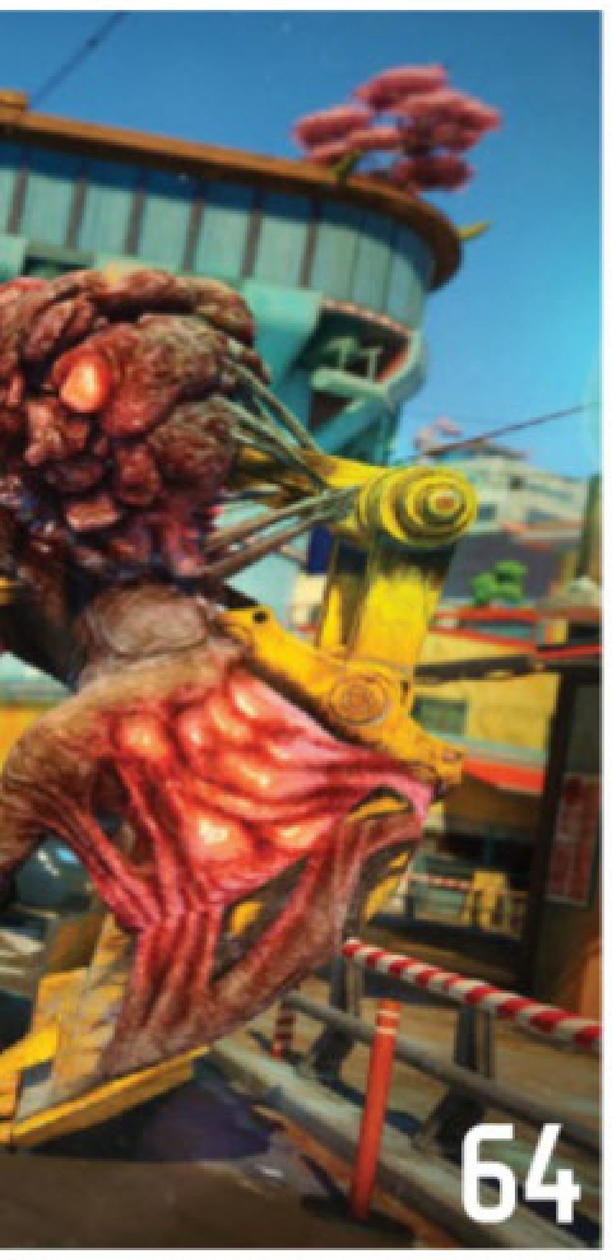
CIVILIZATION: BEYOND EARTH • HYRULE WARRIORS • THE WITNESS • FAR CRY 4 • GEARS OF WAR 4 • MIRROR'S EDGE 2 • MORTAL KOMBAT X • UNCHARTED 4 •

SUNSET OVERDRIVE THE WITCHER 3 SUPER SMASH BROS. HALO 5: GUARDIANS

48

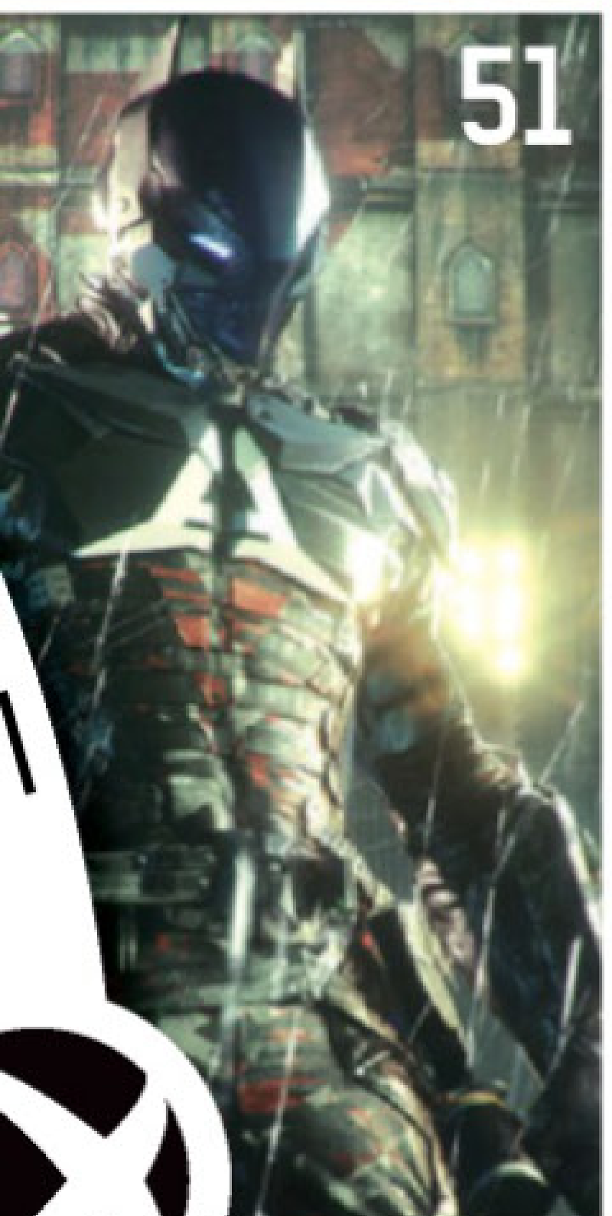
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60

















WHILE WE MAY BE RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE INFAMOUS 'SUMMER DROUGHT', WE AT LEAST HAVE A DECENT AMOUNT OF GAMES TO LOOK FORWARD TO IN THE COMING YEAR. WHETHER YOU'RE INTERESTED IN THE REAL HARDCORE, INSANELY DIFFICULT GAMES, THE COLOURFUL, CASUAL, CHILD-FRIENDLY GAMES, THE FIGHTERS, THE PUZZLERS, THE REMAKES, THE NEW IP, THE REBOOTS, THE SEQUELS – ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING! – WE'VE GOT YOU COVERED IN OUR HUGE PREVIEW FEATURE THIS ISSUE. IT'S CERTAINLY TAKEN A LITTLE WHILE BUT THE NEW GENERATION OF GAMING IS FINALLY HERE









UNITED WE STAND

The sun-dappled jungle thickets of the Caribbean may have offered Edward Kenway an exotic stage for his sea-faring tale of betrayal and pirate-based treachery, but it didn't feel like a traditional *Assassin's Creed* game. *Black Flag* was a stellar effort – a fine redirection of the *Assassin's Creed* formula – but the open terrain and focus on oceanic navigation were strides away from the metropolitan verticality gamers had come to associate with *Assassin's Creed*. There were no assassination missions, not in their purest form, and while we enjoyed the untamed islands that populated the glistening waters of Ubisoft's historical Caribbean, *Black Flag* felt more like a middle ground between *Far Cry* and *Assassin's Creed* than a true successor to the legacy of the latter. It lacked the tight narrative that drew us in so close to Ezio and Altaïr (let's forget about Connor…) and it looked at the game world through a wide lens.

With *Assassin's Creed: Unity*, Ubisoft is taking the franchise back to its roots – in both a spiritual sense and a physical one. Ubisoft Montreal is drinking deep from the well of its French heritage, setting the game in revolutionary France – homeland of the company at large – and using the complex, iconic architecture of the city to frame a story as winding and intricate as the stone-paved streets themselves.

"[Paris] is the most urban city we've ever had," explains Vincent Pontbriand, senior producer at Ubisoft Montreal. "It's the biggest city as well. We made a choice to focus entirely on Paris," – there are no fractal regions, à la *Assassin's Creed II*, here – "Why? Because we wanted to make sure that we give the players a chance to explore it inside out. When I say that, what I mean is that for the first time you can go inside any buildings, (or actually one out of four buildings, to be more precise). We're also having tiers for landmarks; we have the catacombs, we have the sewers and all these interesting places in Paris. The world is super large; there's a billion things to do, and that was our main focus." With nine teams across the wider »



THE SEVENTH ENTRY IN THE ANNUAL FRANCHISE, ASSASSIN'S CREED: UNITY NEEDS TO BE MORE THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS. WE SPOKE TO UBISOFT MONTREAL'S SENIOR PRODUCER, VINCENT PONTBRIAND ABOUT LOOKING BACK TO MOVE FORWARD, AND HOW UNITY IS THE ASSASSIN'S EXPERIENCE PLAYERS HAVE BEEN ASKING FOR...

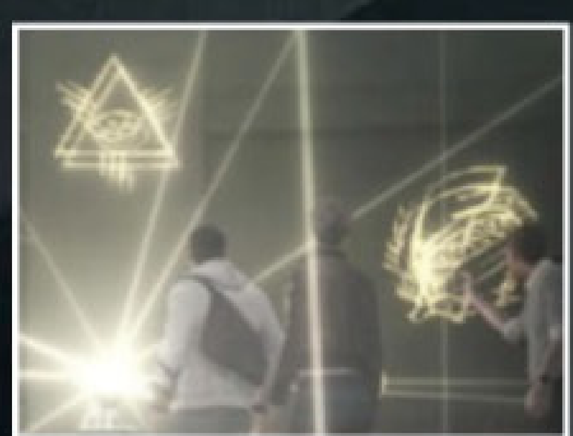
THE NEW AGE OF GAMING IS HERE
EVERY GAME YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT IN ONE PLACE

Ubisoft umbrella working on the game, too, Ubisoft Montreal has managed to recreate the hugely populated city in a more realistic way than ever before: with up to 1000 independently acting NPC characters able to be generated at any one time. Remember the awe with which you admired the crowds walking through Acre in *Assassin's Creed*? Unity promises to reignite that feeling, but for modern machines and their potential power.

Revolutionary Paris also provides a cornucopia of assets for Ubisoft Montreal. The defining mechanic of the Assassin's Creed games has, in the eight years the franchise has been alive, always been the way players can interact with the sandbox locales their athletic avatars come to learn. By the time you've finished playing an *Assassin's* game, you feel like you can travel to one of the myriad cities that Ubisoft made your virtual home and recognise buildings, landmarks, historical signposts, etc. Paris, since the Revolution, will be one of the most unchanged cities Ubisoft Montreal has worked with, and with the sharp new AnvilNext engine the game provides almost photo-realistic graphics, the sense of cyber déjà-vu any Parisian will get from playing *Assassin's Creed: Unity* will evolve from the unsettling to the uncanny.

BLIND ASSASSINS

If we'd been more attentive, we'd have known there was an upcoming *Assassin's Creed* game set in Paris *four years* ago. Writer Jeffrey Yohalem recently unveiled that, at the end of *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*, there were hidden symbols you could uncover by initiating your Eagle Vision. The French reference was the Phrygian cap; a limp red hood that came to symbolise liberty and freedom after the Revolution's (in)famous Bastille day. There was also a Masonic eye, which apparently foretold the setting of *Assassin's Creed III*.



The more detailed the environment, the more refined the traversal mechanics will have to be, though. The navigational aspects have remained largely unchanged since *Assassin's Creed II*, with *III* and *Black Flag* bolstering content by providing naval navigation, rather than revolutionising the way core traversal works. *Assassin's Creed: Unity*, however, has gone back to the drawing board, and made the navigational aspects of the game as horizontally/vertically-friendly as the map design is. "We've basically added the ability to go up or down," Pontbriand explains, "so before, we had the climbing which was vertical, and then we had free running which was more horizontal and you could see these highways that we placed on the different buildings to point this out. We wanted to make that more systemic and more fluid, so in *Unity* we blended both systems and we call it parkour. Basically what you can do now is by move up and down by hitting two different buttons, so it's much faster to travel exactly where you want to. You don't necessarily have to find like an elevator to do a leap of faith. And then we change all of the animations to make it feel fresh." This should address the occasionally clunky way the Assassins dismounted from their perches – tripping off walls or leaping to footholds that didn't exist.







● There was a huge financial crisis in Paris at the time of the Revolution, so it'll be interesting to see how Ubisoft uses money in this game – it'll be a little disappointing if it works in exactly the same way as in previous games…

THE GAME'S NEWLY REFINED ANIMATIONS AND VERTICAL MECHANICS WILL TAKE NEW PROTAGONIST ARNO DORIAN, a native of Versailles, into the depths of the French Revolution – one of the most well documented historical events Ubisoft Montreal will have worked with; producing our modern view of human rights, delineating our perceptions of class, highlighting the rise of liberalism and establishing France's strength as a nation under republic rule – the Revolution is a richly detailed historical canvas.

"History is our playground," Pontbriand tells us, "we try to be historically accurate as much as possible so whenever we can find a hole or something that's not as well documented, we'll try to exploit it. Otherwise we try to respect history and just suggest things that might have happened to explain it. It's always a challenge, and we try to be very respectful." The French Revolution also treads the line of being recent enough in history to still be a sensitive matter – as with any uprising, revolutionaries were vocal in getting their message across, while nationalists were



The French Revolution is known as a particularly violent episode of European history, so it'll be interesting to see if the kill mechanics, assassinations and takedowns will reflect that.

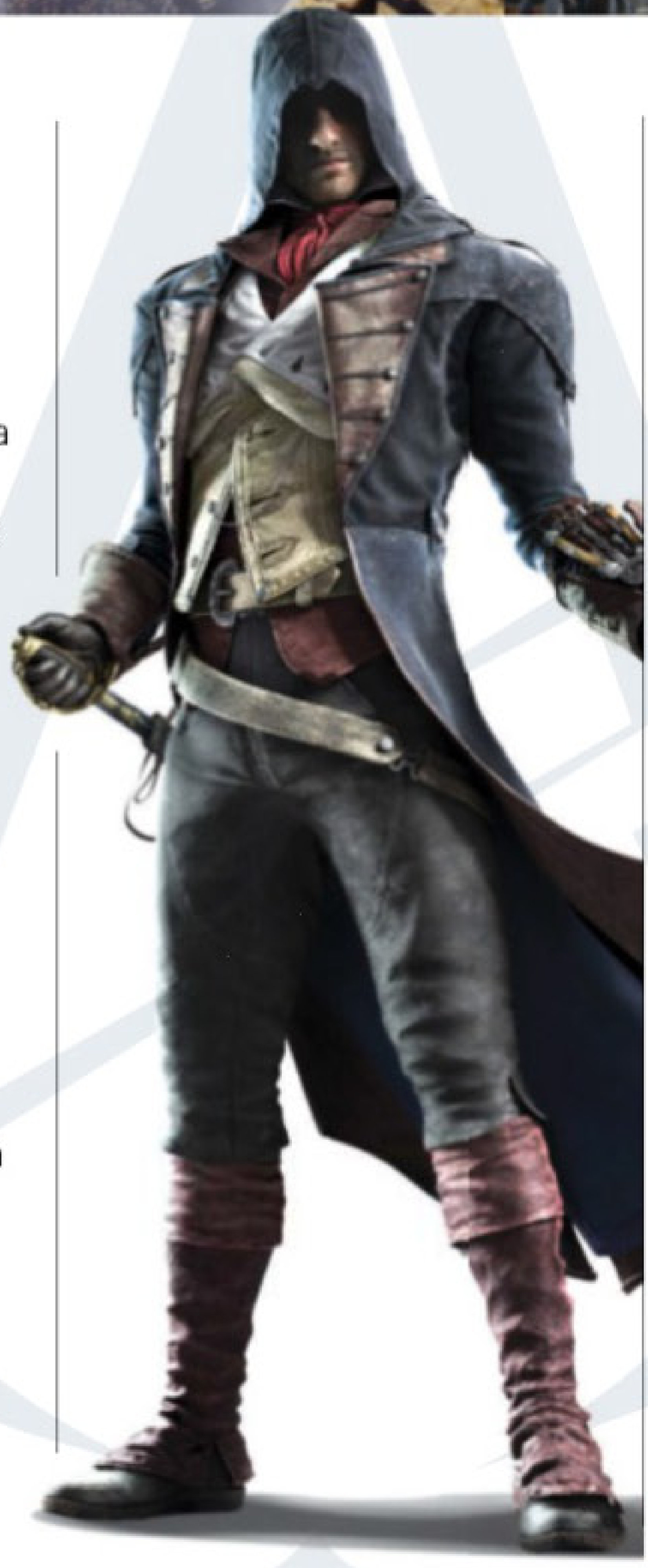






keen to make an example of uprisers; acts of brutal violence, rape, torture and execution were commonplace between 1789 and 1799 – the decade within which the Revolution is considered tied to (though there were significant developments either side of the decade, too). It's a moral grey area that Ubisoft will have to cautiously navigate.

"The French Revolution is a very complex period, there's no clear winners or losers," Pontbriand explains. "There are different events during the Revolution that were very complicated to explain, so what we did is that we used the French Revolution as just a background for the main story which is about Arno, a character [more realistic] than the likes of Forrest Gump. He's not necessarily involved in beheading the king or any of these things; it just wouldn't make sense and it wouldn't feel right. But you'll see these events that are happening there in the background, and you might be witness to them." It's an altered path – a refined and more prospective route than previous *Assassin's Creed* games have taken, using the chaotic setting of the game to provide a contextual framework for the narrative, rather than trying to wrangle a story out



of events just to justify the Assassins' presence (like the magic pope from *Assassin's Creed II*) *Unity* seems to be going back to the basics of *Assassin's Creed*; the centrifuge of accessible mechanics, engaging narrative and graphical superiority upon with the first few games rested, albeit with a couple of much needed refinements.

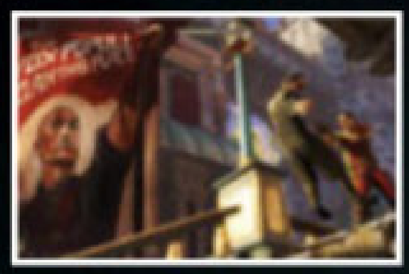
"What we do is, with each iteration of the game, we try to see what people would really like to see in a future entry, and if that is even possible," details Pontbriand. "We managed to get two of the most requested features, actually number one *and* number two, [into *Unity*]. First, the ability to play with friends: this is what a lot of people have been asking for, waiting for. The second? The ability to craft or customise your own character."

It seems *Unity* is the result of Ubisoft putting its ear to the ground and listening to the raucous chatter of its fans. "[Co-op and customisation aren't] the »

VIVA LA RÉVOLUTION!

Though the setting of the French Revolution is largely untouched in gaming, the general theme of the general population rebelling against an imperial regime certainly isn't. To get you in the mood for *Unity*, and the serious angle it'll take on the most nefarious revolution of all time, we gathered together the most notorious anti-system demonstrations in gaming:

BIOSHOCK INFINITE



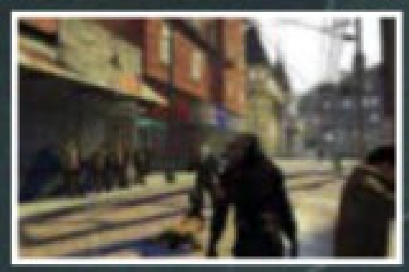
The militant left-wing revolutionary group, the Vox Populi, ran rampant through the airborne city of Columbia with a single-minded aim of taking down the controlling Founders and their bourgeoisie lifestyle with them. The red-flag symbolism of the Vox movement runs parallel to the Parisian revolution.

DISHONORED



Hiram Burrows, spymaster of the game's ruling Empress Kaldwin, orchestrates a coup to dethrone the autocrat and take her place. Deceiving the population of local city Dunwall into believing protagonist Corvo assassinated Kaldwin, Burrows inadvertently sets Corvo on a campaign of revenge, killing all involved with the coup in the process.

HALF-LIFE



After the alien Combine effectively enslave the human population, the imaginatively named Resistance Fighters – led by a messianic Gordon Freeman – stage an underground revolution with the hopes of bringing down their new alien overlords.

RED FACTION



After the Ultor Corporation takes liberties with the treatment of civilians living on its land, a rebellion begins on the red planet in which you – an exasperated worker drone – rise up to become the driving force of the whole upheaval.

SCENES WE'D LIKE TO SEE

The French Revolution is rich with iconic events for Ubisoft Montreal's team to pick apart and lace with Assassin-lead conspiracy theories. We're assuming the Templars are going to be the ingrained aristocracy that the revolutionary Assassins eventually remove from power, but – knowing Ubisoft – it's also unlikely to be that black and white. Here are the most notable moments from one of the biggest Revolution the world has ever seen that we'd like to experience:

THE BIRTH OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

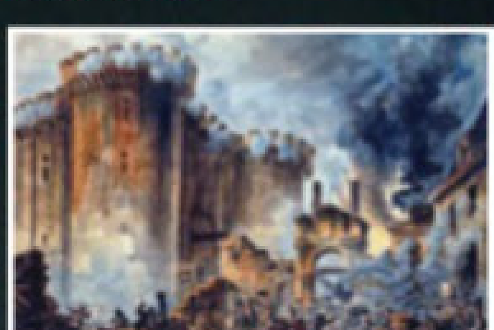
10 JUNE, 1789



One of the major flashpoints that set events that triggered the Revolution in motion, the National Assembly was the result of France's so-called 'Third Estate" (read: 'the People') declaring themselves a legitimate governmental power. The other two Estates – the clergy and the nobility – were intimidated by the strength and influence of the Assembly and King Louis XVI ordered the Salle des États, the Assembly's HQ, to close. Eventually, the Clergy joined the Assembly, leaving the nobility alone, and vulnerable.

THE STORMING OF THE BASTILLE

14 JULY, 1789



The Bastille fortress was effectively the biggest armoury the French royalists had in Paris, and a long-standing symbol of the noble hierarchy's power. Technically a prison, at the time the insurgents storming the fortress, the building held only seven prisoners – the anti-establishment movement was more concerned with taking back a building that was a potent symbol of the bourgeoisie Ancien regime. The fight for the Bastille lasted only seven hours.

WOMEN'S MARCH ON VERSAILLES

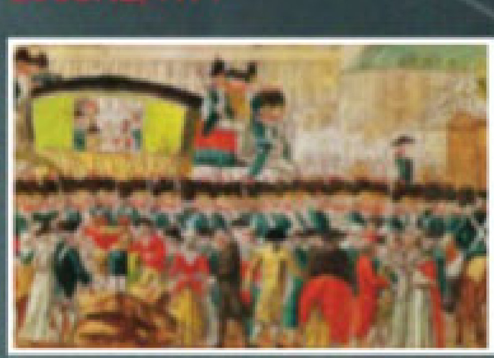
5 OCTOBER 1789



On 1 October, a group of female activists protested outside the Hôtel de Ville, attempting to raise awareness about food shortages and pressure the King to move to Paris to legitimise the National Assembly. The initial protest was met with no response, so upwards of 7000 women joined together and took cannons and small arms to storm the palace of Versailles, persuading the King to relocate to Paris by force.

ROYAL FLIGHT TO VARENNES

20 JUNE, 1971



Post-revolution, the National Assembly had established a constitution that declared France would be ruled by a single unicameral assembly. Louis XVI and his wife, Marie Antoinette, were unhappy with the outcome and still stood against the movements of the populous. Response to their protest was unfavourable, and fearing for their life, Louis and Marie dressed themselves as servants (and dressed their servants as nobles) and managed to escape the Tuileries Palace to the army's general's camp at Montmédy.



● These screenshots are in-engine; meaning what you see here is exactly what you'll end up playing on release. Hard to believe, but true… Unless Ubisoft Montreal 'does a *Watch Dogs*' and downgrade between announcement and release…

» sole focus for *Unity*: it's like a refresh of the franchise, returning to its roots. We want players to feel the fantasy of being an assassin. You know, tasked into going on an assassination, all over again. And we really wanted to have that lore explained back to players like assassins versus Templars. We're going back to the roots. This is what *Unity* is all about. And then of course we're featuring shared missions for the first time, so you can play with the brotherhood and go on assassination missions. And then of course it's next-gen, so better graphics, better everything, more systemic stuff to do in a living, breathing sandbox."

THE CO-OPERATIVE NATURE OF THE GAME IS SOMETHING THAT HAS INTRIGUED US. THE ASSASSIN'S games have set up the perfect universe for co-op, established as far back as *Brotherhood* – Assassins are lone agents, predators prowling through cities and wildernesses engaging in pan-global guerrilla warfare with the massing Templars. Yet, if called upon, these lone wolves come together, a formidable pack that can take down prey that a single Assassin would never be able to target. It's a fascinating prospect – and we're certain it's going



● Bustling town squares brimming with guards sounds like the perfect opportunity to plan extravagant and bloody takedowns with your friends.





Arno, so you can customise him, his gear, his clothes, his skills, all of these things, and this is how you differentiate yourself from other players. When you're playing online, the only twist is that we're giving other players that you see, your friends, have a random face just so that they look like other Assassins from the brotherhood. That's the twist, but we're not cheating! [laughter]. Everyone's playing Arno, everyone can play the main path, the main single-player campaign. And once they go on the brotherhood missions they keep on levelling up their character this way."

It's basically drop-in, drop-out co-op that makes it seem as if everyone is joining your game when you synchronise with their Animus avatars. It's an ambitious take on co-op, reminiscent of *Watch Dogs'* asynchronous multiplayer. Those who prefer their narrative at their own pace need not fret, though – Ubisoft has made sure to cater for all tastes, and basically, everything you do in the game has a point, a purpose. In terms of length, the single-player campaign is longer and then there's dozens of hours of co-op play, for sure. There is always other stuff to do, and if you [don't feel like doing the missions] then you can explore and find all the collectibles and side-missions with the Brotherhood, too."

The storytelling division between single-player and co-operative online play is interesting, especially from a narrative perspective; Ezio, the runaway favourite *Assassin's* protagonist, managed to be a strong and emphatic character, largely because of the interactions we saw between him and the other assassins he met throughout his three-game tenure. He was personable, charismatic and was given more chance, generally, to win us over as a central narrative figure. Arno is another motivated largely by revenge, whose quest for redemption will see him

"IT'S LIKE A REFRESH OF THE FRANCHISE, RETURNING TO ITS ROOTS"

VINCENT PONTBRIAND, UBISOFT SENIOR PRODUCER

to make for some incredible co-op missions, but it's also a difficult task to pull off. Co-op missions require completely different level design to single-player ones, difficulty spikes need to be implemented to account for more players, the reward-vs-effort balance addressed for four parties… Pontbriand reassured us, though, that Ubisoft has had the game in development for three years, and that the co-operative aspect of the game has been at the forefront of the studio's mind when designing the missions.

"So basically, everyone is playing through the perspective of Arno, our main character," he illustrates. "We didn't want to have two games. We wanted to have one sole experience and also we have to create the game that fits our universe rules – you know, we have a lot of history, we have a legacy of games now so we have set specific rules of how the Animus works and how genetic memory works and stuff like that. We wanted everyone to craft their own play style through

become a utilitarian vessel through which the Brotherhood enacts its will. It's Ezio and Altaïr all over again, but with a Parisian backdrop rather than an Italian or Middle-Eastern one. Arno's backstory may sound trite, but it's another *Assassin's Creed* staple – another way Ubisoft is going full-circle and returning the series to its roots.

promises to weave a story worthy of following on (almost directly) from the events of *Assassin's Creed III*.

"We have a full single-player campaign, which revolves around the story about Arno and his own personal quest for redemption," explains Pontbriand. So far, so *Assassin's Creed*, right? "He's trying to figure out who killed his father. That's the summary, I guess. Arno's father was killed when he was eight years old in mysterious ways. But he feels responsible for that. I don't want to ruin all the details, but basically he lives with trauma and then he gets an adopted father for a few years, and then that character also gets murdered at some point. Arno decides to join the Assassins because it's the best way for him to figure out who did that to him, and why. You'll see that there's a huge conspiracy everywhere, and that it'll all be tied into the French Revolution in some ways. Then there are the Brotherhood missions – objectives that Arno has to complete with the Assassin's Brotherhood. So he's not always working just purely for himself. It's all part of the meta-story;

It's strange to talk about a franchise that's only eight years old going back to its roots, but it's to Ubisoft's credit that the template upon which the original *Assassin's Creed* was based has been so drastically altered in that time. It takes a brave studio to admit the direction it was taking its franchise was off-kilter, and to recalibrate its course in favour of delivering fans exactly what they want.

We're excited about *Assassin's Creed: Unity*; more than anything, it's proving that Ubisoft – despite being one of the largest developer/publisher houses in the world – is still keen on delivering creative, original gameplay to its massive audience, and keeping the original spirit of *Assassin's Creed* alive. Viva la révolution.



● If you enjoyed the Pirate shanties in *Black Flag*, you'll enjoy the authentic songs of the rebels Ubisoft has put into Unity. You'll be able to hear the people sing, singing the songs of angry men…

DESTINY

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY

Publisher: Activision **Developer:** Bungie **ETA:** 9 September



'IT FEELS LIKE *Halo*.' That's a description you're not going to be able to get away from in the coming months. But then, look at the screens. Of course it was going to feel like *Halo* – Bungie hasn't exactly been subtle in its move away from the franchise that launched it into international acclaim – even the UI elements and icons that spatter the screen look like they could have been taken from *Reach's* multiplayer facet.

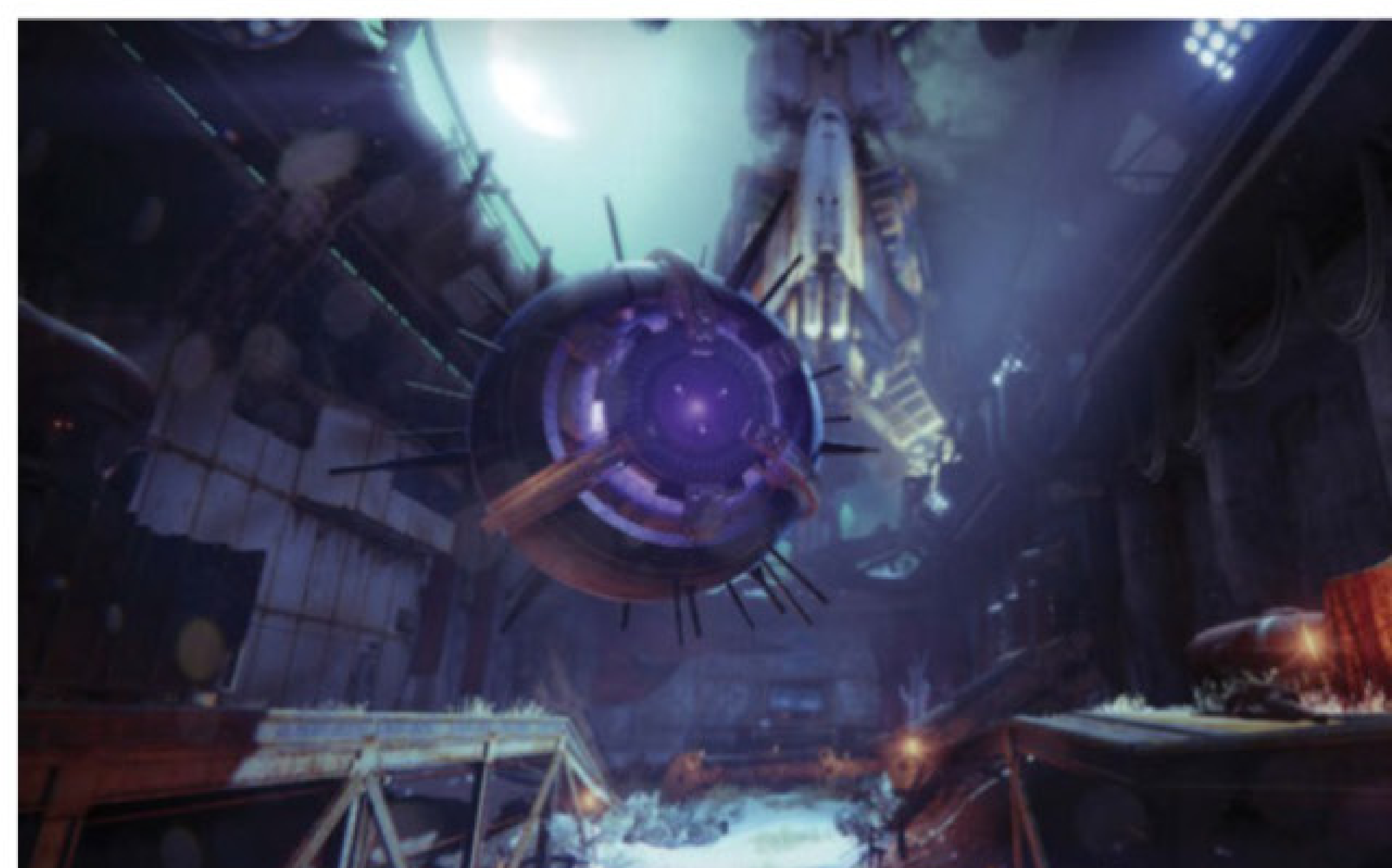
What *Destiny* feels like, at its roots, is a *Halo* MMO that Microsoft never signed off. All the ideas, all the enemy designs, all the weapons – they're all so *Halo*. We've played the alpha through to completion – both PvP and campaign – and not only did we encounter Fallen enemies that could easily be the Covenant, needle rifles (but with *blue* bullets) and a 'Legend' difficulty setting, but we also spent a lot of time in The Crucible; an arena similar to *Halo*'s competitive MP.

> "DESTINY'S MULTIPLAYER IS SLOWER THAN HALO'S AND CREATES A KIND OF CAT-AND-MOUSE MENTALITY BETWEEN THE TEAMS"

It sounds like a lazy comparison; the games are made by the same devs, after all. But once you drop into a game – the zone-based Control being the only option available in our hands-on – you'll notice how similarly everything plays to Bungie's previous PvP opus (specifically *Reach*). Your loadout consists of two weapons, although instead of a sidearm in *Destiny*, you equip a special: snipers, fusion rifles, shotguns and more. Then, you've got your class ability that is effectively a special kind of grenade, and its corresponding super (which charges up similarly to Ordinance in *Halo 4*, points mean prizes). On top of all that, you've got melee. You're a killing machine, simply put, and if your jumps were floatier and your melee sharper, you'd be almost indistinguishable from a Spartan… almost.

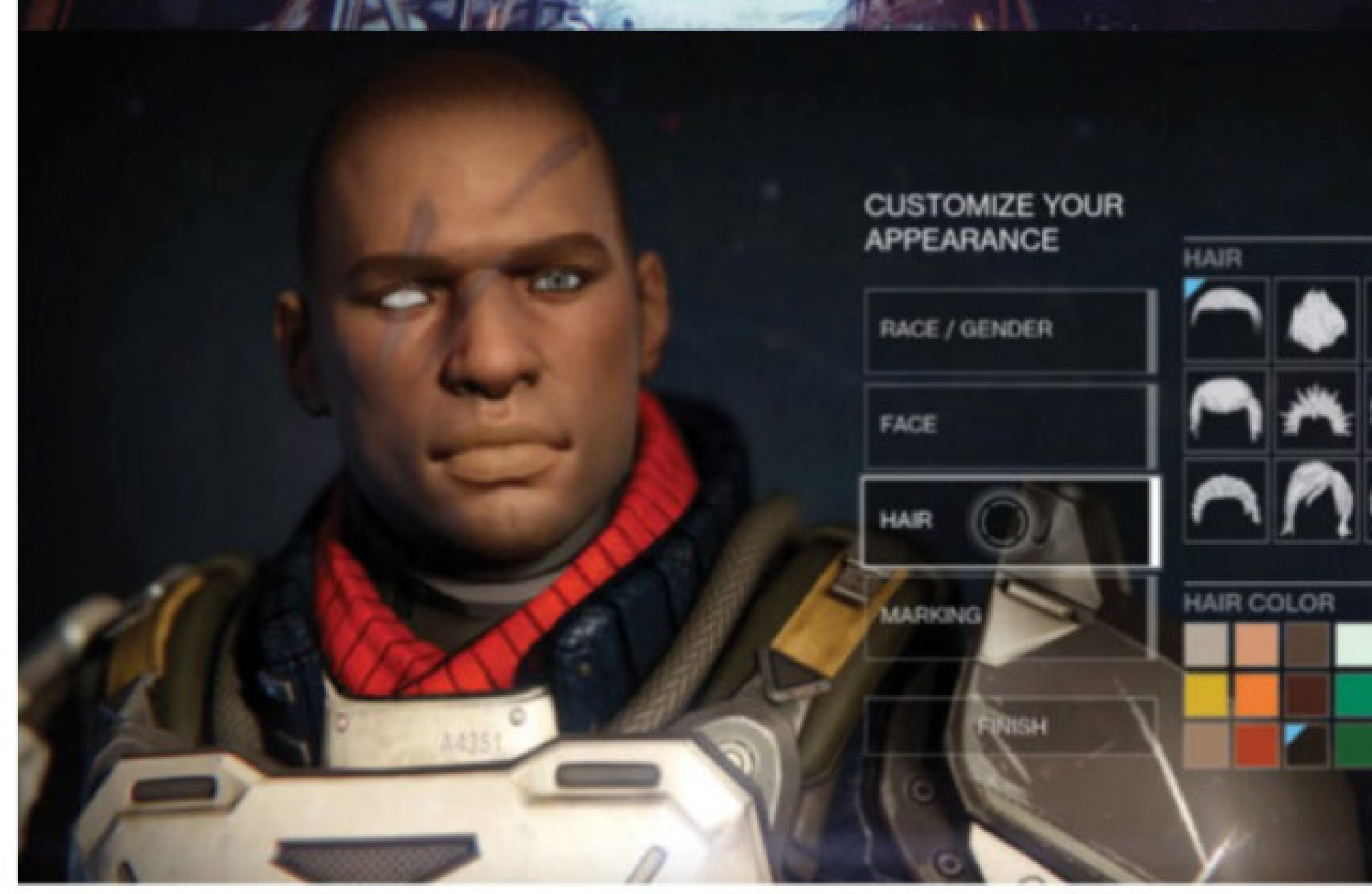
Destiny's biggest sidestep from the revered *Halo* template is the pacing. It's slower – in Control, at least – and generates a kind-of cat-and-mouse mentality between the 6v6 teams. There are six online modes, with the five others greyed out for the time being; you can safely assume there'll be a free-for-all, capture the flag, a spec ops-based non-respawn mode and deathmath. We're hoping to see some variant of one-shot one-kill SWAT, or even Oddball thrown in there, too.

Bungie state in the intro to the alpha that this is a test whether or not its servers can take the realistic strain of what Destiny is doing. They can. While loading times between PvP games might be a little on the longer side than we're used to now, we've had no issues with disconnection or finding matches – an impressive feat considering how the game's hopper tech works, matching you with randomers on the fly. We even played a Strike with a small team of two other players – there was no extra loading or waiting for a pair-up; we selected it ourselves and started playing.



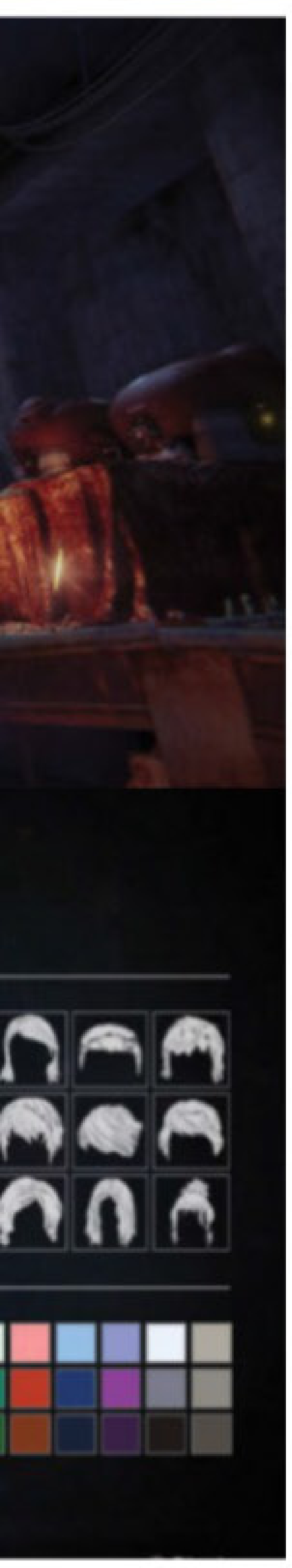
/// It's all very impressive, but don't be fooled by Bungie's assertions that this isn't an MMO. It is. It's just one made for consoles – no bloated interfaces, a simple, easy UI and a dedicated, standalone PvP arena outside the main game. The menus and equipment select screens (there are some substantial loot-'em-up elements) are navigated with a cursor, weirdly, but that's the only jarring PC MMO hangover we encountered. Everywhere else, it feels like the MMO console game players will want.

The average console player may be put off by the term MMO, but this is unlike anything we've played before. It's like *Borderlands*, but with a *Halo* twist, operating in the MMO spectrum. It's fascinating, and we're counting down the days to the Beta, just so we get to jump into *Destiny*'s mythic sci-fi world once again.

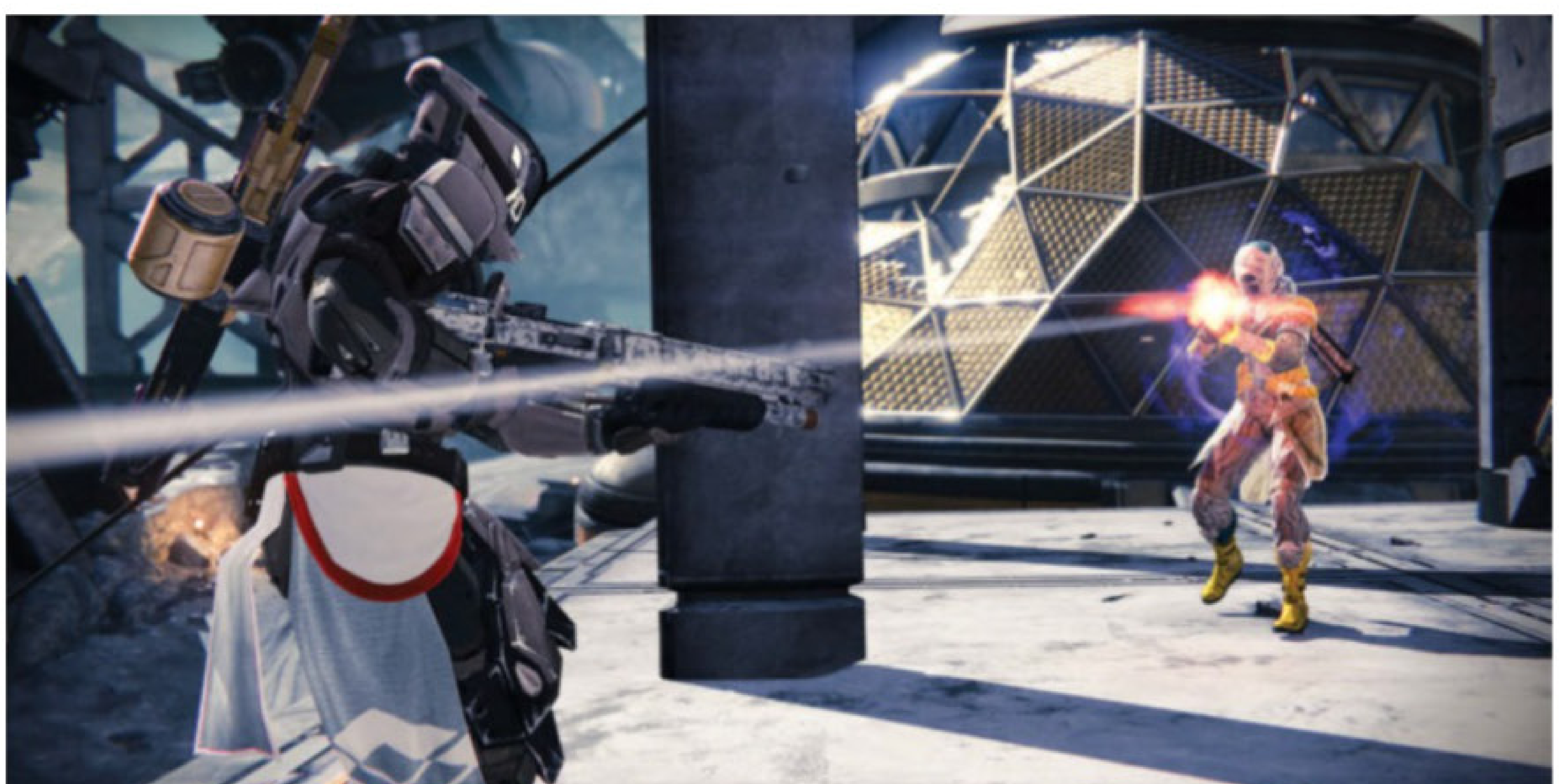


Above: The sheer weight of customisation options available for your armour is offset by the arbitrary cosmetic creation you'll find when you first boot the game up.





Above: Just look at these screens and try not to think of *Halo*. The biggest difference is the new British announcer – who lacks the booming gravitas of Bungie's previous work. Left: This giant purple oculus is the first big boss we saw in the alpha. In true MMO style, it requires a co-operative approach to take down, otherwise it's just a gruesome slog that mainly involves refilling depleted ammo.





ROUNDUP



DEAD ISLAND 2

Release date Spring 2015
Developer Yager

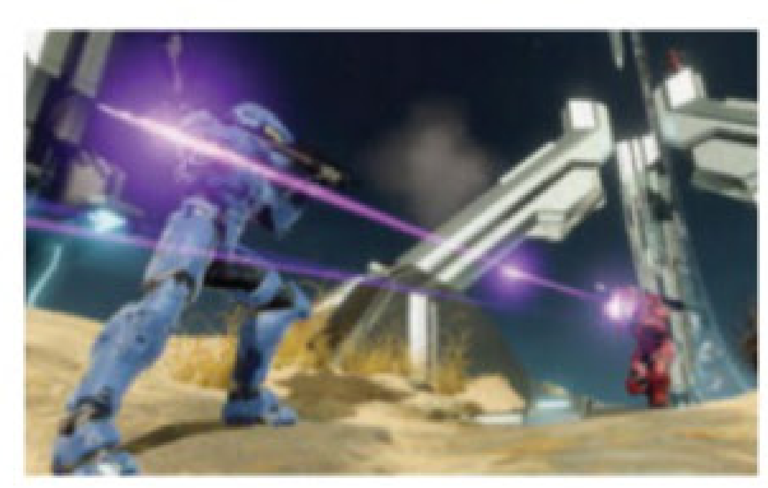
With *Dead Island 2*, the IP has moved into the hands of Yager – the developer behind *Spec Ops: The Line*, a self-aware, contentious look at military shooters and the tropes they enact. Here's hoping that Yager will bring that satirical edge to the zombie genre – which would be fitting in a series that divided opinion so strongly in its previous two iterations.



HOMEFRONT: THE REVOLUTION

Release date Spring 2015
Developer Crytek

Crysis 3 and *Ryse: Son Of Rome* didn't particularly wow us, but we're really hoping that working in an established (but still fresh) IP will reinvigorate Crytek this time around. The game looks stunning, at least – you can always assume that's the case with Crytek – and we're hoping the game's setting two years after the events of the original will set up *The Revolution* nicely.



HALO: THE MASTER CHIEF COLLECTION

Release date Spring 2015
Developer 343 Industries

A package that includes remastered, HD versions of *Halo: CE Anniversary*, *Halo 2 Anniversary*, *Halo 3* and *Halo 4*, the *Master Chief* collection is 343's attempt at reinvigorating the rapidly deflating *Halo* servers. It should do the job, too – with over 100 MP maps, new terminals that reveal the story of *Halo 5*'s agent Locke and a TV series on the side (*Nightfall*), it's a *Halo* package fans have been after for years.



UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END

BETTER NATE THAN NEVER

Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment **Developer:** Naughty Dog **ETA:** 2015

■ REMEMBER HOW GOOD Joel looked in *The Last Of Us*? All those animations, the incredible attention to detail in his face, the subtleties, the technical mastery… well, imagine that, but twice as good. *Twice.* Nathan Drake in *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* will be composed of twice as many polygons as Joel – and when you think back to how incredible Drake looked in *Uncharted 3*, with all of his slight interactions with the game environment, ruffles in his clothing, responses to stimuli – the promise of a doubly realistic Drake gets us tingling with excitement (even if his ageing has rendered him looking more like Old Snake than old Drake…)

All the footage we've seen from the game so far has been in-engine at 60 frames per second and the visual fidelity is absolutely flooring. From the intricacies of a fly's wings and feet, crawling over a cut on Nate's head, to the languid ripples of water in a puddle we find our erstwhile protagonist face-down in, everything we've seen is so clear, so exceptionally lifelike, that we're actually a bit worried we might not be able to suspend our disbelief if anything a bit off-the-wall happens in the final product. Still, we guess there are worse things to be worried about with a game as anticipated as this.

"NATHAN DRAKE IN UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END WILL BE COMPOSED OF TWICE AS MANY POLYGONS AS THE LAST OF US' JOEL"



■ Naughty Dog has stated that the game will run at 1080p and 60fps on the PS4, meaning we'll get to explore the exotic locales of Uncharted in greater clarity than ever before.



HALO 5: GUARDIANS THESE… ARE… SPARTANS!

Publisher: Microsoft Studios **Developer:** 343 Industries **ETA:** September 2015

XBOX WOULDN'T BE Xbox without *Halo*. The franchise's original creator may have pulled a Victor Frankenstein and turned its back on the space odyssey to work on new pet project (*Destiny*), but that doesn't mean Master Chief is dead. Far from it. 343 Industries proves it has the wherewithal to keep the series' legs moving with *Halo 4*, which still enjoys a huge amount of daily online activity despite two new console launches trying to steal its userbase.

343's legacy looks set to move from strength to strength with *Halo 5: Guardians*, just one part of the overall *Halo 5* 'journey' (as Microsoft is insistent on calling it). Alongside *Halo 5: Nightfall* – a Microsoft exclusive TV show directed by Ridley Scott – Guardians promises to enact near-cinematic gameplay, which will be presented in 60fps, making the gruesome alien slaughter look like something you'd see, well, in a Ridley Scott film. We've yet to see exactly how TV series and game will marry up (we assume it'll be similar to *Halo 4*s game vs. its *Forward Unto Dawn* TV companion), but either way, Microsoft is throwing a ridiculous budget at this, and the publisher's confidence is very reassuring.



The multiplayer component of *Halo 5* promises more Spartan abilities – something guaranteed to make Halo's trademark MP madness even more frenetic.



If recent trends carry through, *Halo 5* will include a stupendous amount of customisation options so you can make your own personal avatar feel like you.



TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX: SIEGE

THE DEATH OF THE PATRIOTS

Publisher: Ubisoft **Developer:** Ubisoft Montreal **ETA:** TBA 2015

THE LAST TIME we saw a *Rainbow Six* game on our screens was *Rainbow Six: Vegas 2* – we've been teased with the mysteriously titled 'Patriots', which was supposedly in development for over three years, but as of the announcement of *Siege*, it's become clear that *Patriots* is dead.

Out of the ashes rises *Siege*, though; a game that takes the open-plan level design the franchise is known for and applies it to a *Counter-Strike* PvP template. In the modes we've seen, one team are assigned the role of a terrorist splinter group, and take a hostage whom they're tasked with defending. The opposing team – the military – have to hunt down the terrorists and their human prize and rescue the terrified civilian from them. It's all very asymmetrical – an oddity amid the current trend of Deathmatch-focused multiplayer games dotted around the market – and victory is achieved if either the soldiers extract the target or the terrorists wipe out the soldiers.

Rainbow Six: Siege is keen to travel back to the series hardcore roots. There's no rechargeable health to be found here, no red lines on the screen that slowly fade as you recover health. No, *Siege* is a one-shot, one-kill affair – an active decision on Ubisoft's part to hopefully force players into being more tactical in their approach to the FPS. There is a renewed emphasis on co-op, reminiscent of *The Division* (a Ubisoft stablemate of *Siege*) and forward-thinking. If you don't work as a team, you will fail – that seems to be the aim here.

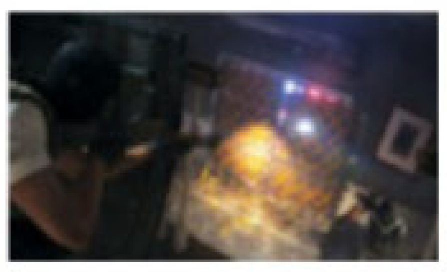


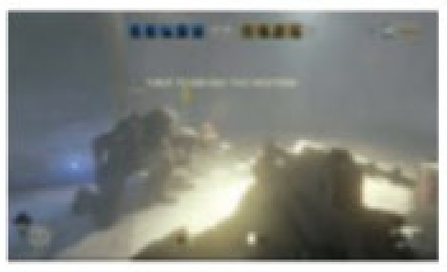
The fully destructible environments promise to make *Siege* a sandbox for all your hostage-taking fantasies. It remains to be seen whether you can blow up tunnels under the map to burrow out yet, though

> "THERE'S NO RECHARGEABLE HEALTH TO BE FOUND HERE. SIEGE IS A ONE-SHOT, ONE-KILL AFFAIR"



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The squad-based objective-centric nature of the FPS seems to have been dialed back recently, with the blockbuster franchises focusing more on the arcade-style multiplayer experience than the cautious, hardcore one. Hopefully Ubisoft's intentions to corner the market (between this and *The Division*, it's likely that's the plan) will pay off, opening up a sub-genre in two distinct styles: both the MMO one, and the traditional one.

If all that busy multiplayer out-foxing of one another isn't your scene, though, fret not. *Siege* also includes a campaign mode – while we're almost certain that won't be a lengthy affair, it should at least offer some interesting narrative on *Siege*'s game world, maybe even explore the complex mythos of the *Rainbow Six* universe a little more… we wouldn't even be surprised if we saw some *Splinter Cell* lore crop up, owing to Ubisoft Montreal's current trend of mixing game worlds together…









The first-person view affords some incredible takedowns, which strengthen the power fantasy of being a free-running martial arts genius.

MIRROR'S EDGE 2

'CAUSE YOU GOTTA HAVE FAITH

Publisher: EA **Developer:** DICE **ETA:** TBA 2016

YOU WOULDN'T THINK a studio that specialised in vehicular-based 32-player deathmatches would be particularly adept at first-person parkour simulators, but when DICE released *Mirror's Edge* back in 2008, a large proportion of the gaming community took a step back and marvelled at the result. Nothing like it had really been done before, from the clinically pristine totalitarian regime of its world to the first-person Go-Pro perspective, everything felt fresh. It took the Noughties parkour trend and ran with it (no pun intended), simultaneously inventing a new genre and reinvigorating the old 2D momentum runner with a fresh new angle.

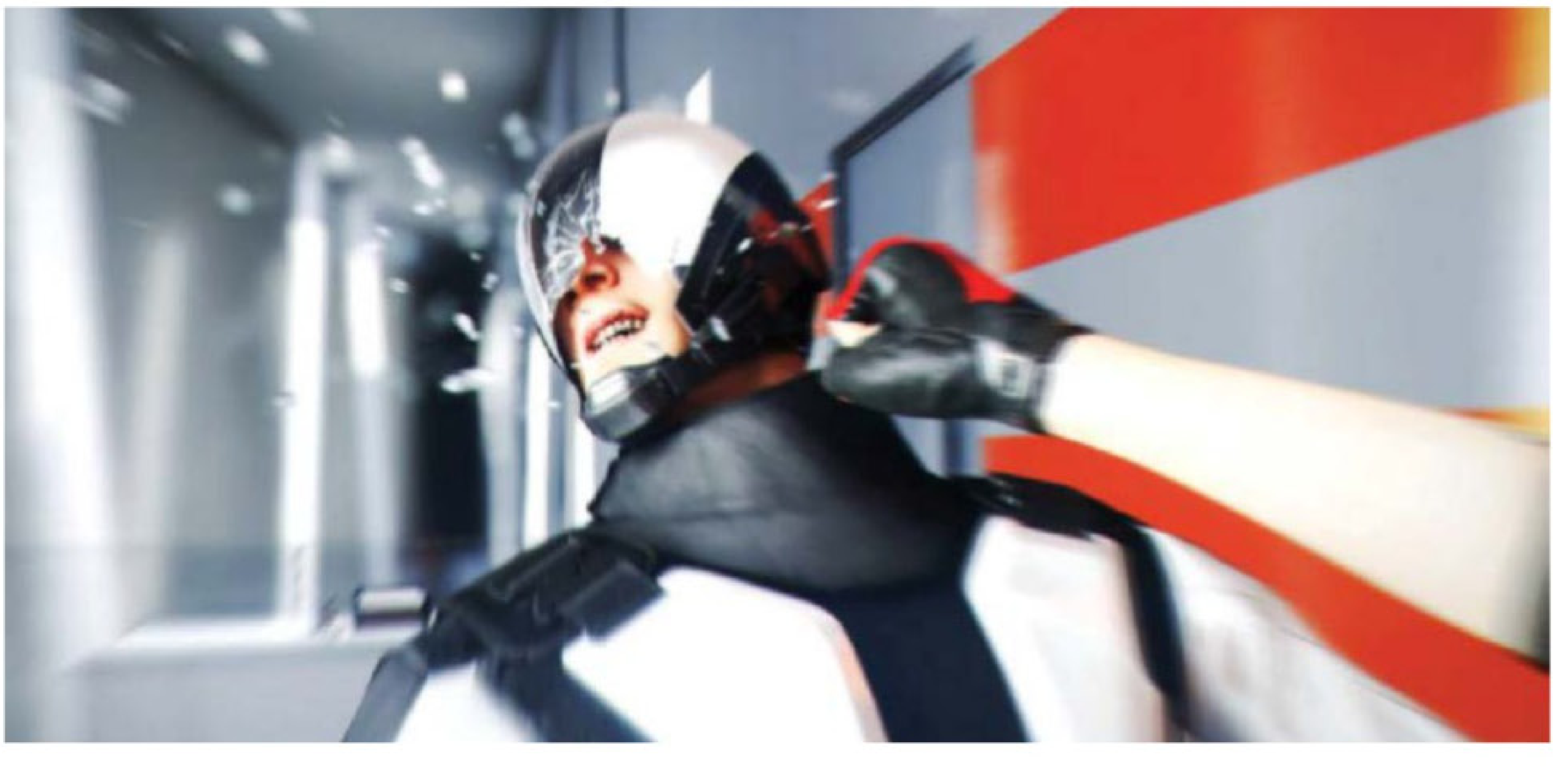
So when *Mirror's Edge 2* was announced earlier in the year, we perked our heads up. Information has been scarce, but we've recently seen the game in action, and it's clear that DICE are putting its incredible Frostbite 3 engine to spectacular use. This time around, the whole game is designed to coerce the player into exploration and traversal – little flourishes have been added to protagonist Faith's moveset to accommodate this vision; she can now swing around corners whilst wall-running by grabbing vertical pipes, or move straight from walls and ledges into takedowns. This means you won't have to interrupt your momentum to take our hostile forces this time around (the fractal nature of traversal/combat was one of the major sticking points for fans of the series in the first instalment).

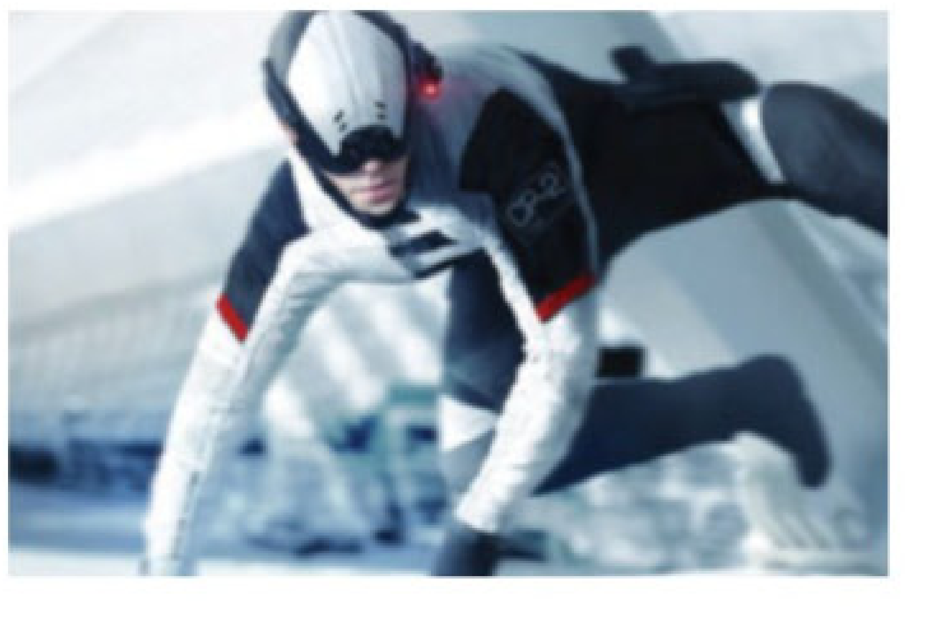
DICE understands that *Mirror's Edge* was fairly niche, but this time the developer is keen to reach out to a wider audience – the 'standard' paths through a level will be safe, not impossible for amateur players to navigate, but they will take longer. Experienced players (or time trial masochists) will still be able to sniff out more dangerous routes, though, which promise to push the limits of your twitch-based muscle memory to their limits. Faith's reserve of athletic moves has been expanded, too, allowing the level designers to engineer setups that will challenge the player's way of thinking, as well as their execution.

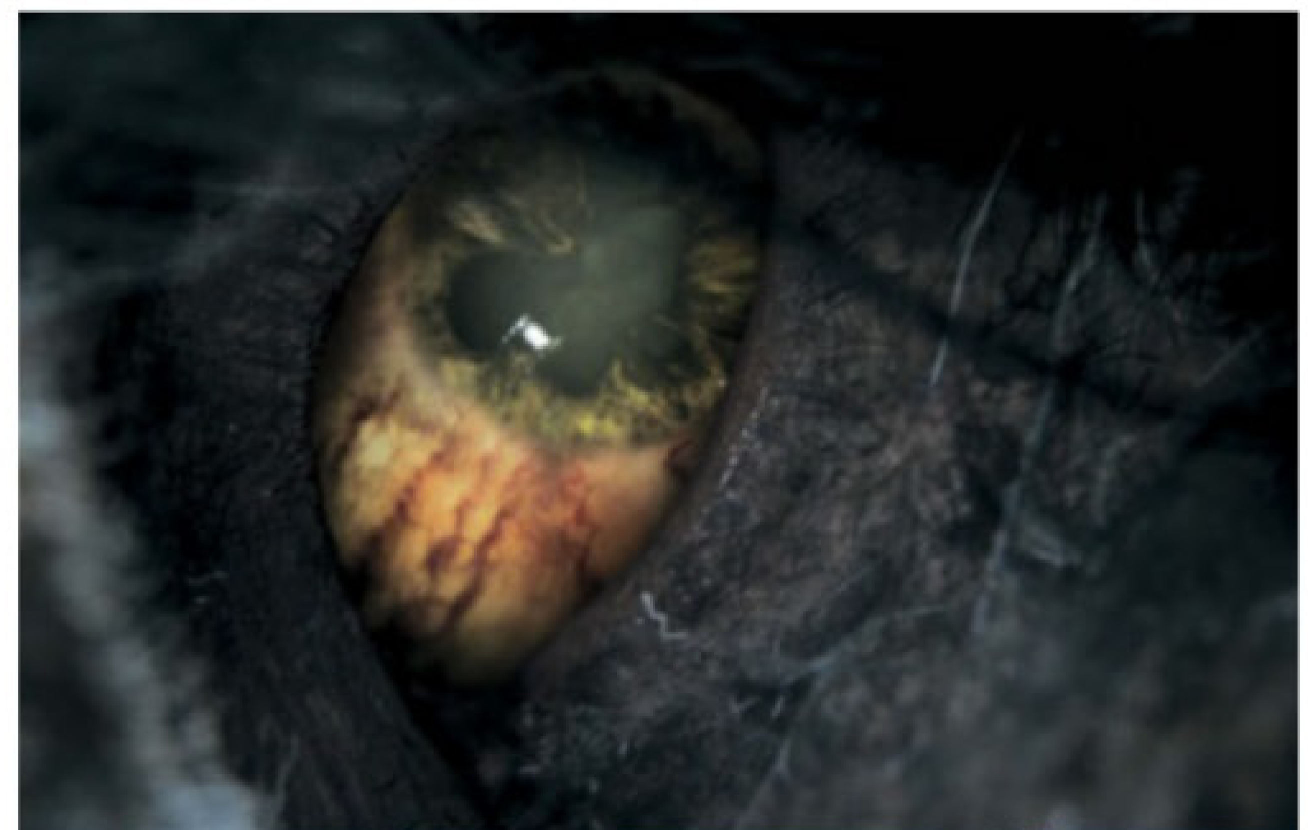
Mirror's Edge writer Rhianna Pratchett won't be reprising her role in the second instalment of the series, so the storytelling style of the first game will undoubtedly be different, but we're confident that DICE will be able to deliver a game that is as strong as the original *Mirror's Edge*.

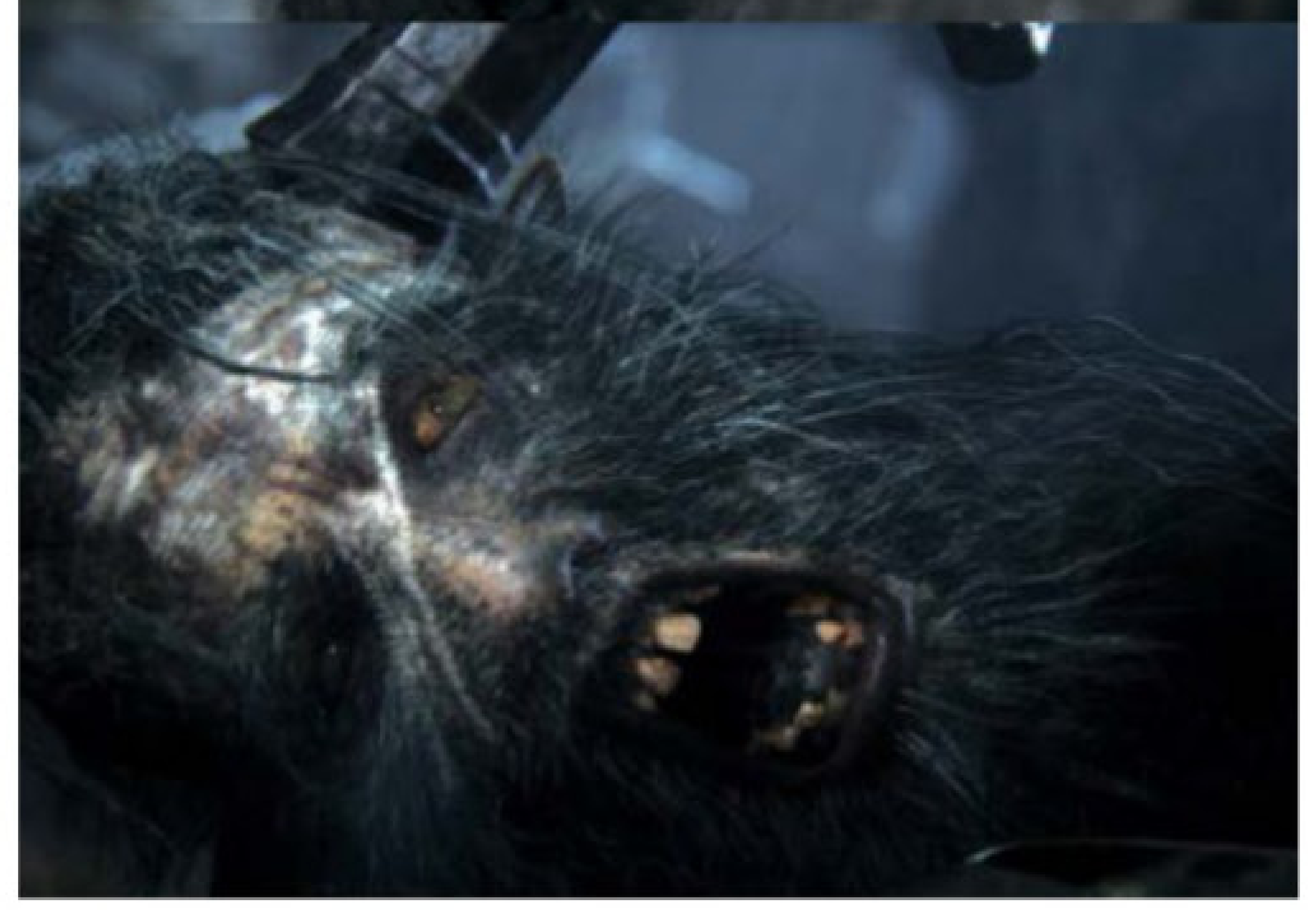
> "THIS TIME, THE DEVELOPER IS KEEN TO REACH A WIDER AUDIENCE"

You could spend all your time running up walls, backflipping onto your quarry then breaking their neck... or you could just smack them in the mouth.









Below: If you like your violence fully-flavoured and gruesome, then *Bloodborne* is for you. This is a man literally getting the 'saw cleaver' through his face. Lovely.



BLOODBORNE THE NIGHTMARE OF YOUR DREAMS

Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment
Developer: From Software
ETA: 2015

IF YOU EVER found *Dark Souls* (and its affiliated releases) a little tiresome – enjoyable but sluggish – then take a look at *Bloodborne*. If you ever found *Ninja Gaiden Black* too off-the-wall, too quick and imprecise, then take a look at *Bloodborne*. It's an action-RPG much like the aforementioned titles, but it's a lot quicker than the former, and a lot more intuitive than the latter. It's a labour of love by From Software, and studio head Hidetaka Miyazaki, and it's been in production for three years already. The PS4 exclusive takes place in a Victorian prefecture named Yharnam – a cursed little town afflicted with a plague that transfigures the local townsfolk into grotesque and nightmarish beasts, Lovecraftian in their design and yet still infused with a very Japanese style of body-horror. The enemies may look bad, but believe us they act worse.

"MIYAZAKI WANTS PLAYERS TO 'FEAR FOR THEIR LIVES' AT EVERY ENCOUNTER"

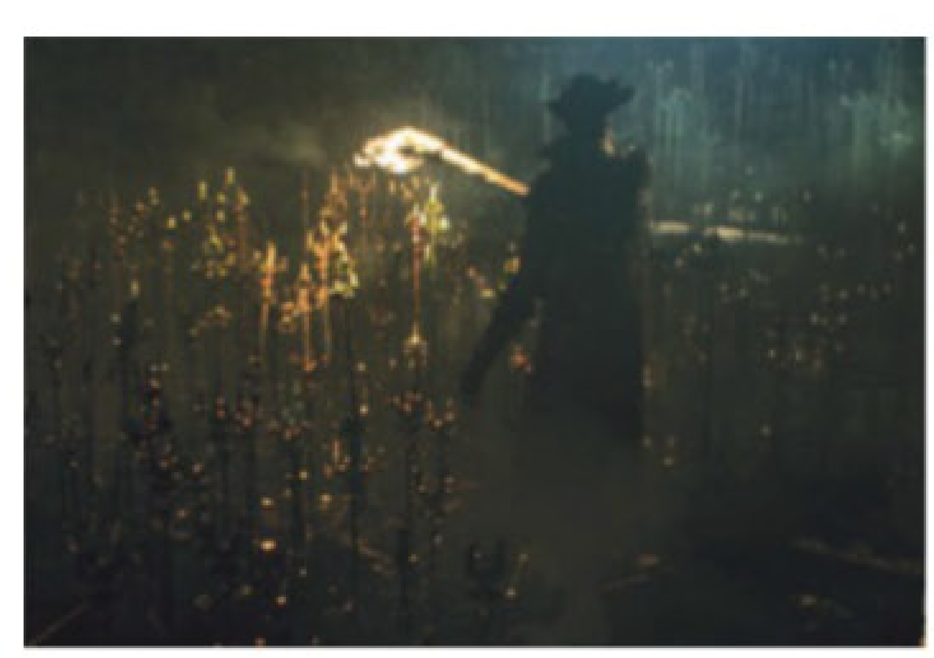
In keeping with From Software's remit, *Bloodborne* is hard. Miyazaki has stated that in setting up this new IP, he wants to alter the game's pace from a more passive, defensive structure to a more active one. So while things aren't as relentless as they are in, say, *Devil May Cry*, you're going to find the game throws a lot more at you, a lot quicker, than previous entries in the *Dark Souls* series.

/// Miyazaki has outlined that he wants players to 'fear for their lives' at every encounter – so much so that when each engagement is over, the player will be fatigued, heads down, breathing deeply, giving silent thanks to their console that the battle is over. Bosses, for example, have been designed to look impossible to defeat on first impressions – trial and error is going to be your friend here.

You're equipped with a 'saw cleaver' – a tool specifically designed for rending the flesh from the ghouls of Yharham – that can be set to three different positions, each with a different style of attack. You'll be able to equip guns, too – a new direction for From – and picking holes in an enemy's defense will require a keen eye and, bluntly, guts. This isn't *Dark Souls*, you won't be able to sit back and observe until you figure out a plan of attack – this game is going to force your hand. If you don't react, your blood will decorate the gothic walls of Yharham, over and over again. Prepare to die, because you'll be doing it a lot.



The variety of enemies you'll encounter in *Bloodborne* promises to be ridiculous, each of them no doubt inspired by horrific creatures from various mythologies.





SUPER SMASH BROS.

AFTER GETTING HANDS-ON WITH BOTH THE WII U AND 3DS SUPER SMASH BROS. GAMES™ TALKS TO SERIES CREATOR MASAHIRO SAKURAI ABOUT THE MOST DIFFICULT GAME OF HIS CAREER

Publisher: Nintendo **Developer:** Bandai Namco, HAL Labs.
ETA: 3 October (3DS), 2014 TBC (Wii U)

MARIO, SONIC THE Hedgehog, Mega Man and Pac-Man all step into the arena. If this was 1991, the games industry might have imploded. But this is 2014, and while the popularity of these pixel pioneers has been on the wane in recent years, there's still a palpable excitement in the room as *Super Smash Bros.* creator Masahiro Sakurai pits these iconic creations against one another in the latest sequel in his fighter franchise.

"It really is a miracle," beams an ebullient Sakurai to the gathered room of journalists. "[We have] four of the most famous characters in the videogame industry on the same screen battling each other. The only game that makes this possible is *Super Smash Bros.*"

"And, just between you and me," he adds, leaning towards the crowd as if to whisper in the ear of each participant, "I'm aiming to make this the number-one character game in the world."

He may have done just that. After branching out into third-party characters in *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* to incorporate Mario's long-standing rival Sonic and *Metal Gear Solid*'s Snake, Sakurai ostensibly posted a tournament invitation to every retro icon that tried to overthrow the mighty plumber during his Eighties and Nineties reign. And while Sonic has been zealous in his willingness to team-up with Mario in recent years and Mega Man's inclusion in the game is well known by now, it's the addition of Pac-Man that had the crowd wakka-wakking in delight.

/// "The new *Smash Bros.* is being developed by Bandai Namco Games and one of Namco's most famous characters is of course, Heihachi." Sakurai cracks a smile. "Just kidding. As he has such a long history, we did our best to bring Pac-Man into the series."

Sakurai is bridging the generations of *Pac-Man* by using his Pac-Land physique, but also incorporating moves that enable him to transform into the pizza-shape *Pac-Man* form present in his Eighties coin-op. "*Pac-Man* made his debut in 1980, a year before *Mario* arrived, so I really wanted to bring that history into the game," explains Sakurai. "We've also incorporated other *Pac-Man*-esque elements like throwing fruit and eating Pac-pellets."

Sakurai demonstrates the character's abilities in a Smash battle by trouncing the competition (proving that Pac-Man *is* the retro king), but he also delves further into the more technical aspects that make for a divisive change to the core combat of *Smash Bros.*

"I've added the ability to customise characters," reveals the director. "Customising characters doesn't mean adding equipment or whatnot to power-up the character, but rather to adjust the fighting styles of the character."

Above: The announcement of *Pac-Man* joins the inclusion of Palutena from *Kid Icarus* and Mii Fighters from your own imagination.









"I'M AIMING TO MAKE THIS THE NUMBER-ONE CHARACTER GAME IN THE WORLD."
MASAHIRO SAKURAI, HAL LABS.



Below: Sakurai explained that the reason to remove transformation was partly due to the limitations of the 3DS hardware.



How this works is relatively simple, even if it does add a splash of strategy to the existing mechanics. In previous games, each character had four special moves activated by holding B and pushing in a direction. This time around there are twelve (three for each direction), with one standard move and two variations. For example, Mario's fireball can be tweaked from a standard attack, allowing for a larger, but slower one, or one that fires quickly in a straight line.

"To maintain the game balance, customised fighters will not be available in With Anyone mode," confirms Sakurai. However, two other new additions to the character roster, Palutena and Mii Fighters, won't be limited to variations of standard attacks; instead they will feature unique special attacks.

In fact, the decision to include the Mii Fighters was a difficult one for Sakurai. The veteran developer struggled with balancing the family-friendly appearance of the Miis – made in the image of their creator – with the violence of the *Smash Bros.* universe.

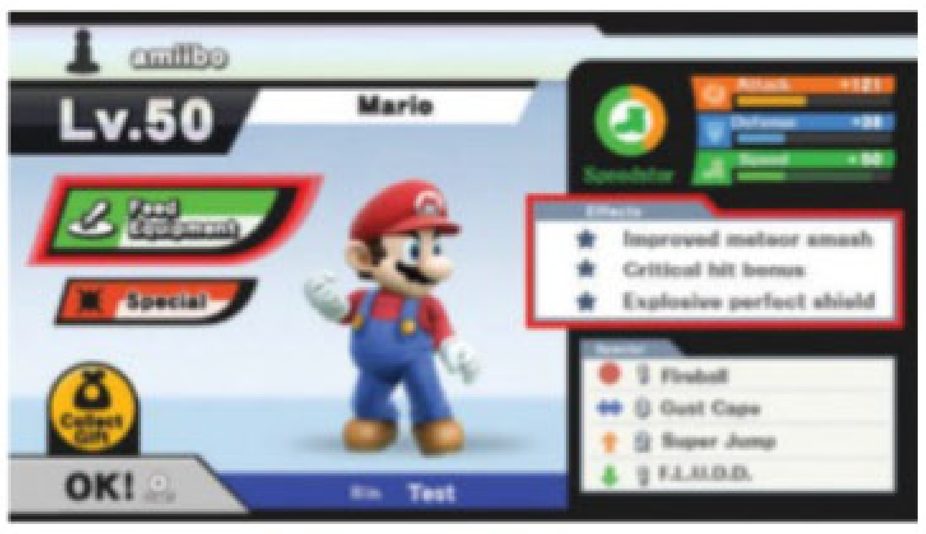
"Mii characters have had an image of being a peaceful, at home character, kind of like your Wii console," says Sakurai. "They don't really fit the image of *Smash Bros*, where you're beating up and dominating other players."

However, Sakurai would be inundated with requests on a daily basis, not just to add Miis, but characters that simply can't exist within the universe – Nintendo of America president Reggie Fils-Aime being overwhelmingly popular with the game's focal fanbase.

"I thought 'if you want him in the game, why don't *you* make him?'" laughs Sakurai. "So I created a tool for you to do just that. With the Mii Fighter creator you can have any character you want join the battle."

/// All these characters will be available on both the Wii U and 3DS and were chosen right at the beginning of the game's development – Sakurai admits he was lucky that Geninja proved popular, as development started long before *Pokémon X* and *Y* was released.

It was a necessary risk, however, given that balance and variety would be important not just for traditional brawling, but also in other single and multiplayer modes. Exclusive to the 3DS, *Smash Run* (based on City Trial from *Kirby's Air Ride*) has players navigating the environment littered with classic enemies from Nintendo franchises, collecting power-ups before facing each other in battle at the end of the time limit.





"You'll gain equipable items in *Smash Run*," Sakurai explains, delving into the mode further. "Equipable items have three characteristics: attack, defence and speed. A character's fighting style will be impacted by what that character has equipped. Fundamentally, raising one characteristic will, in turn, decrease another. This way you can create a slower, more powerful Mario, or a quicker, lighter Mario. So this isn't simply a matter of increasing parameters to create a powerful fighter, but adjusting parameters to create a unique fighting style."

/// Sakurai continues to innovate in and outside of the game. Amiibo figurines work in a similar way to *Skylanders* or *Disney Infinity* models, utilising near-field communication technology to place characters in the game. These figurines will store your character data between each *Smash Bros.* fight. "The character won't appear as a CP [Computer Player] but an FP – a Figure Player," explains Sakurai. "You do not control Figure Players; you level up the FP each time you use it to fight. An FP becomes stronger physically, and it can exceed the strength of a Level 9 computer player. The FPs can be raised to level 50, and it's a fairly quick process to level them up. The figure's brain is a computer, so it will change its way of thinking over time based on the opponent's fighting tactics. It will remember that shielding characters don't move, and it may focus on throwing characters to break their shields. You can slightly alter an FP's attack, defence, and speed by giving it equipable items."

Of course, this won't be a feature that will be available in the 3DS and might go in some way to explain why there's a delay between the Wii U and its handheld counterpart. Sakurai dispels any concerns that it's a cynical move and that it's down to the sheer scale of development. "This is a really big game with a huge scale, and there's so many combinations of things that we have to test," says Sakurai. "We're talking several hundred people working on just that. If we were going to do both of those versions at the same time, you can imagine the amount of people we'd need to do, we'd need to call in thousands of people. Each game has a unique architecture; they really are different, unique games, so each one requires complete attention not only in completing the game, but also in the debug process. To make sure each game gets the full attention, we decided to release them months apart."

Sakurai stresses that this game has been the most difficult of his career and loaded with the expectation from the core *Smash Bros.* community after the relative disappointment of *Smash Bros. Brawl*'s accessible slant, this latest entry has been the most difficult balancing act yet.

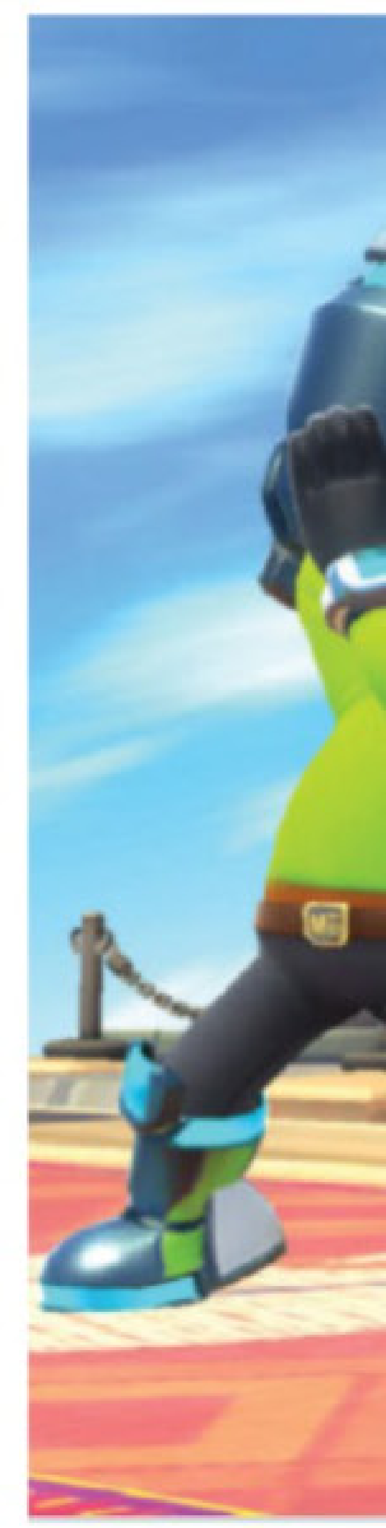
"One of the goals we've set for ourselves is that 'this is a party game'," reveals Sakurai. "We want a lot of people to pick up and play – that's one reason why we have the For Fun/ For Glory mode separation this time around.

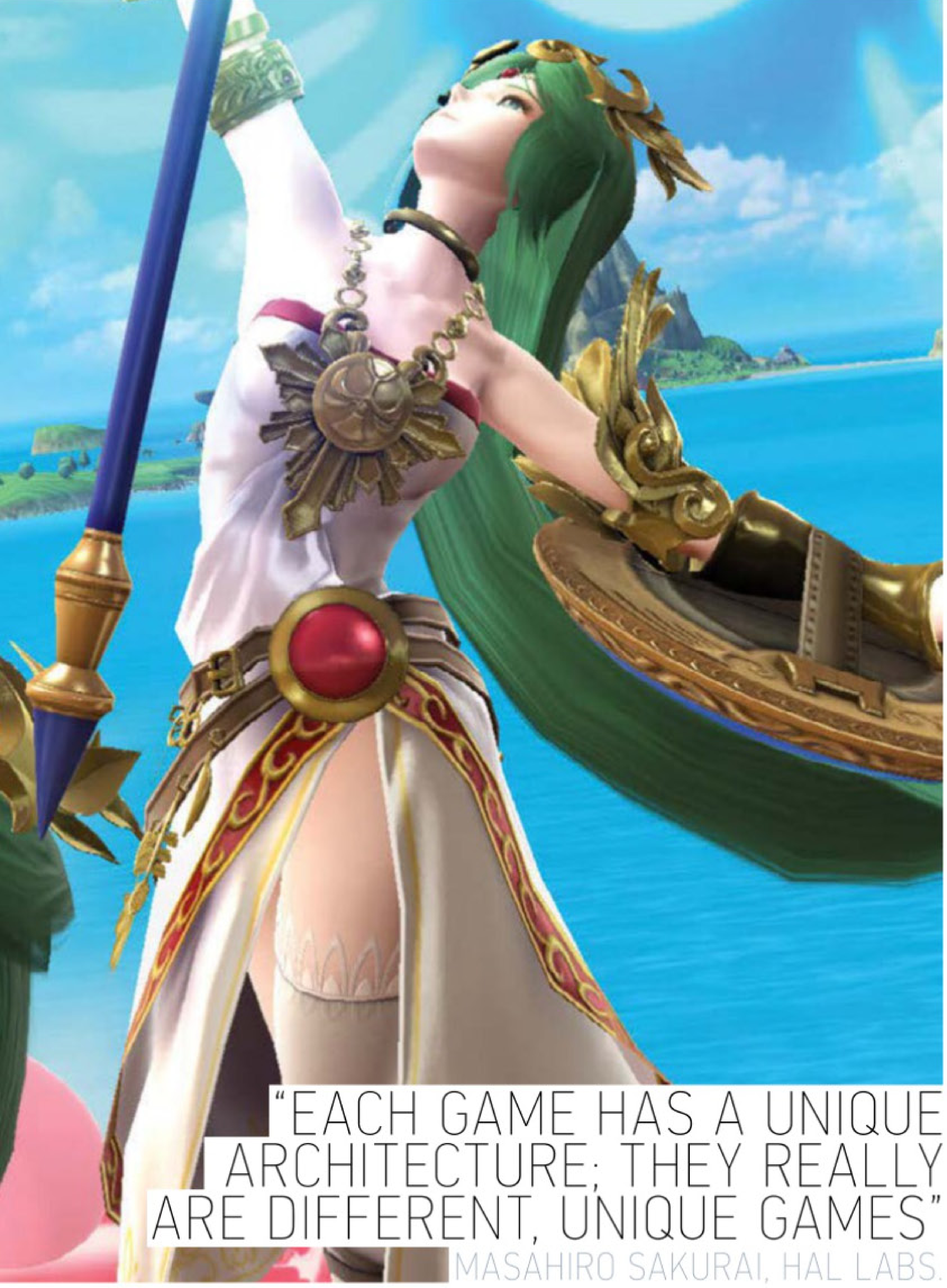
"I think with *Brawl*, if people hadn't played the series before and this was their first *Smash*, there was a lot that appealed to them, but the *Smash* veterans didn't see it as their cup of tea," concludes Sakurai. "One thing as a developer I have to keep in mind is that it's not enough to make a game that will satisfy our core fanbase. We have to reach out and appeal to new players. Finding that sweet spot is always difficult."



Above: There has been some balancing to the core roster. For instance, Bowser is now heavier and able to take more hits, balancing out his power.







> "EACH GAME HAS A UNIQUE ARCHITECTURE; THEY REALLY ARE DIFFERENT, UNIQUE GAMES"
> MASAHIRO SAKURAI, HAL LABS.

Below: Not all the characters in *Smash Bros.* will get their own Amiibo figurines, however Sakurai hopes that gamers will not seek to own them all, but instead will focus on individual fighters.



HANDHELD ROUND-UP



MONSTER HUNTER 4 ULTIMATE

Format: 3DS

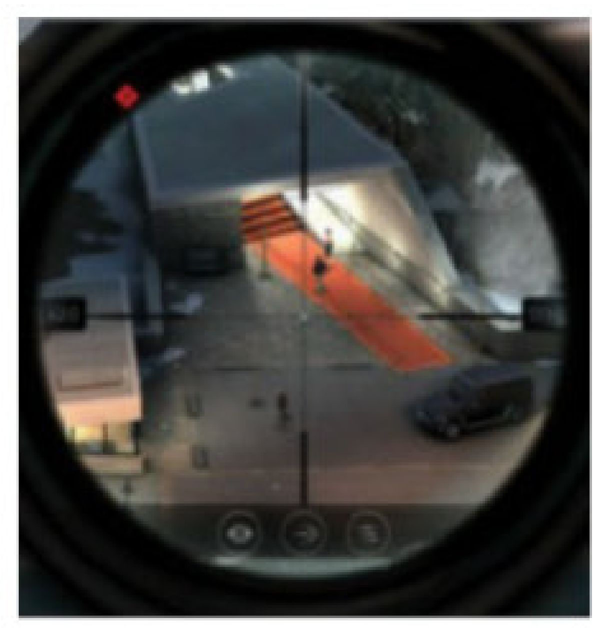
Monster Hunter 3 Ultimate proved a big hit in the West on 3DS and the prolonged wait for its sequel has only made the appetite of its fanbase more ravenous. The big new gameplay addition is the ability to rodeo ride enemies to exhaustion. With refreshed combat and full online support, there's no reason why *Monster Hunter* can't spread its dominance further.



POKÉMON MEGA RUBY & ALPHA SAPPHIRE

Format: 3DS

The re-release of Game Boy Advance's *Pokémon Ruby & Sapphire* on 3DS is a slightly weird one, but at least Game Freak is assuring us that it isn't a simple port of the original. The world itself has been given an overhaul into something much engaging and it ranks among the most impressive remastered editions we've seen.



HITMAN: SNIPER

Format: iOS

Square Enix is following up the excellent *Hitman: Go* with its latest free-to-play mobile expansion, *Hitman: Sniper*. The concept here is a series of missions wherein Agent 47 is given a target to assassinate within a time limit from a far away vantage point. With 150 missions and a variety of XP and perks, expect a much heftier beast this time around.



THEATRHYTHM FINAL FANTASY CURTAIN CALL

Format: 3DS

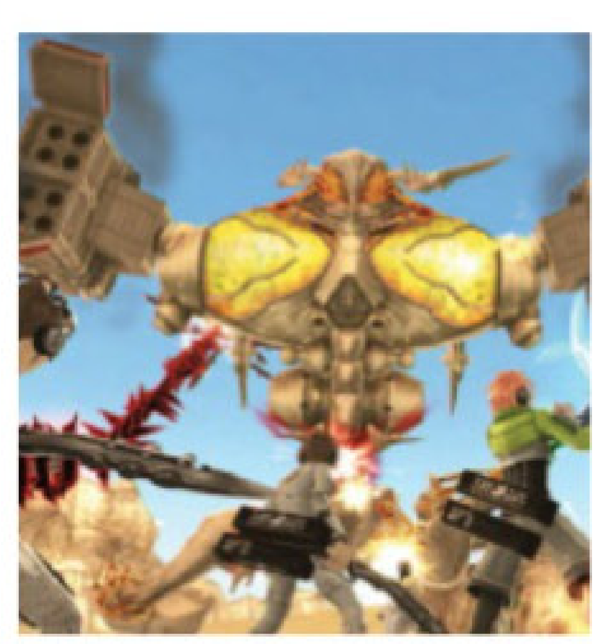
A celebration of some of the best music to ever grace videogames, *Theatrhythm: Final Fantasy* returns, boasting 221 songs and 60 playable characters. Not much else has changed between the soundtrack and the chibi character additions, aside from two new modes – Versus and Quest – that have yet to be showcased properly.



SONIC BOOM: SHATTERED CRYSTAL

Format: 3DS

Much like *Sonic Lost World*'s handheld counterpart, this year's *Sonic Boom* will also receive a portable spin-off heading to the 3DS. Developed by Sanzaru Games, the game is set on a *Mario Party*-style board and focuses on individual character abilities to navigate through each of the game's stages.



FREEDOM WARS

Format: PS Vita

While Sony is switching away from exclusive software on Vita in favour of its other capabilities, that's not to say the system doesn't have a few notable new releases on the horizon. One of the most enticing is *Freedom Wars*. It's a hunter-style game, which means multiplayer players, oversized enemies, loot, crafting and other staples of the genre.







■ Above: We've yet to really see the scope of DICE's *Battlefront*, and whether it'll compare to the early test footage of *Battlefront III* that leaked a couple of years back. Fans have been clamouring for surface-to-space travel.



STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT

THE EMPIRE BUILDING BUSINESS

Publisher: EA **Developer:** DICE **ETA:** 2015

■ "WE AT DICE have the opportunity of a lifetime," declared DICE's design director Niklas Fegraeus, "to make the *Star Wars* games that, as fans, we've all dreamt of playing." As part of the studio's annual incremental information drop on *Star Wars: Battlefront*'s on-going development, there was plenty in the way of kowtowing sentiment in regards to the holy trilogy of sci-fi cinema and not much in the way of concrete details on the actual game.

Nevertheless, as the first announced title on EA's production line of upcoming *Star Wars* titles, DICE has at least expressed its intentions for reimagining one of the more popular videogame offshoots of the brand. Namely, it looks like the Sweden-based studio is working closely with Lucasfilm to assure that enough slavish detail is paid to the property that even the most infinitesimal of details will be replicated accurately within the game.

/// The idea is to go back to where it all began, and that seems to be a mantra reflected both in terms of the studio's hands-on research and in how the game will be structured. DICE has been given unprecedented access to the Lucasfilm archives, unearthing original props to the first movie trilogy to aid in *Battlefront*'s development. And while you'd think by now the geometry of an X-Wing would be securely filed away on a server somewhere at EA or Disney, DICE has decided to use the original models used during the production of the feature films to better represent the source material.

> "WE AT DICE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY OF A LIFETIME"
> NIKLAS FEGRAEUS, DICE

Furthermore, the studio has been touring the world, visiting Finland and California to trace the filmmaker's steps. "We went to the original movie locations," says Fegraeus, "not just to capture the environments but the emotions they evoke as well." So when you're dispatched to Hoth (emotion: presumably *very* cold) and darting between the creaking legs of an AT-AT plodding towards the power generator, it's quite possible that this is the most accurate realisation of those playground fantasies you've harboured since 1977.

WHERE ARE EA'S OTHER STAR WARS GAMES?

■ DICE was the first of EA's first-party studios revealed to be working on a *Star Wars* title as part of the publisher's new deal with Disney, which gives it exclusive rights to develop videogames based on the licence. However, we do know that Visceral Games and BioWare are also working on bringing the world of Banthas, Sith and scruffy-looking nerfherders to life over the next couple of years.

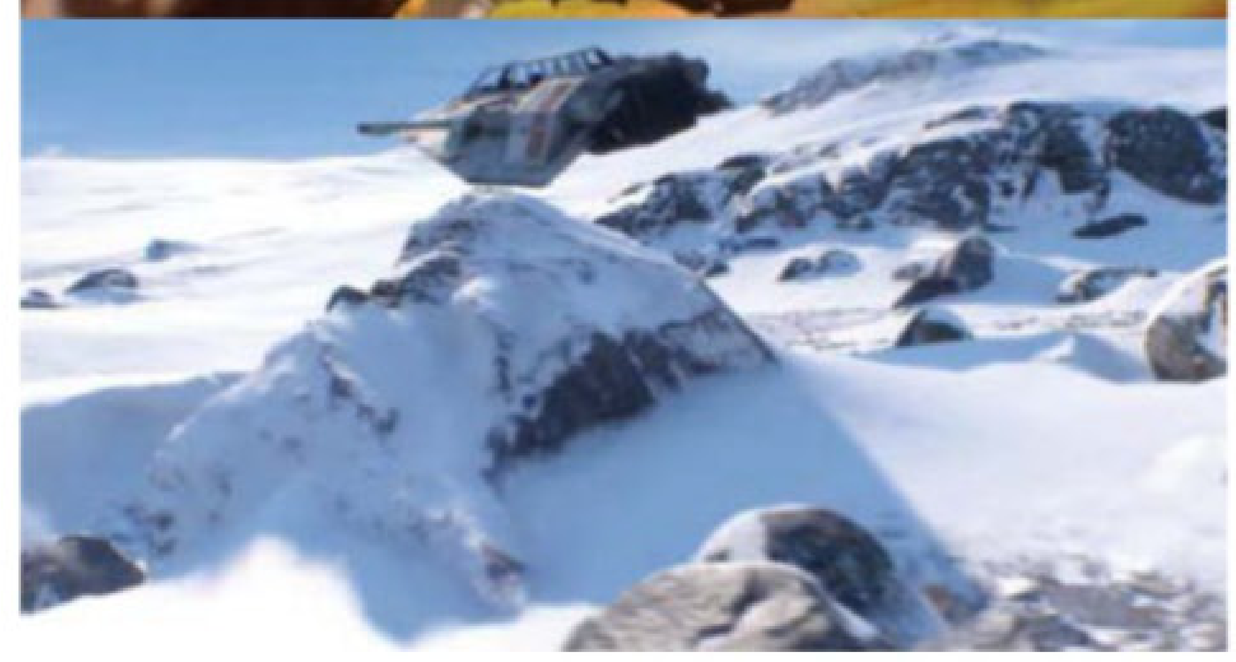
Visceral recently announced that it had poached *Uncharted* writer Amy Hennig from Naughty Dog, presumably to put her scriptwriting prowess to work on a third-person action title. From the studio behind *Dead Space* and *Battlefield: Hardline*, it's unlikely to be anything other than an action-orientated perspective of the universe. In fact, given that relatively little is known about it and that it's in active development, there's always the possibility that this will be the title that will officially tie in with the upcoming movie.

Even less is know about BioWare's effort. After the relative disappointment of *The Old Republic*, the promise of a *Knights Of The Old Republic* sequel is a tantalising one. Of course, these are just the studios that we know are working on games right now. With Disney capitalising on its multi-billion dollar acquisition of Lucasfilm, there's a huge amount of scope for EA to do whatever it wants with the licence. Watch this space.



Above: If Lucasfilm has provided DICE unprecedented access, there's always the possibility that the developer has been able to incorporate features based on the upcoming *Star Wars Episode VII*.





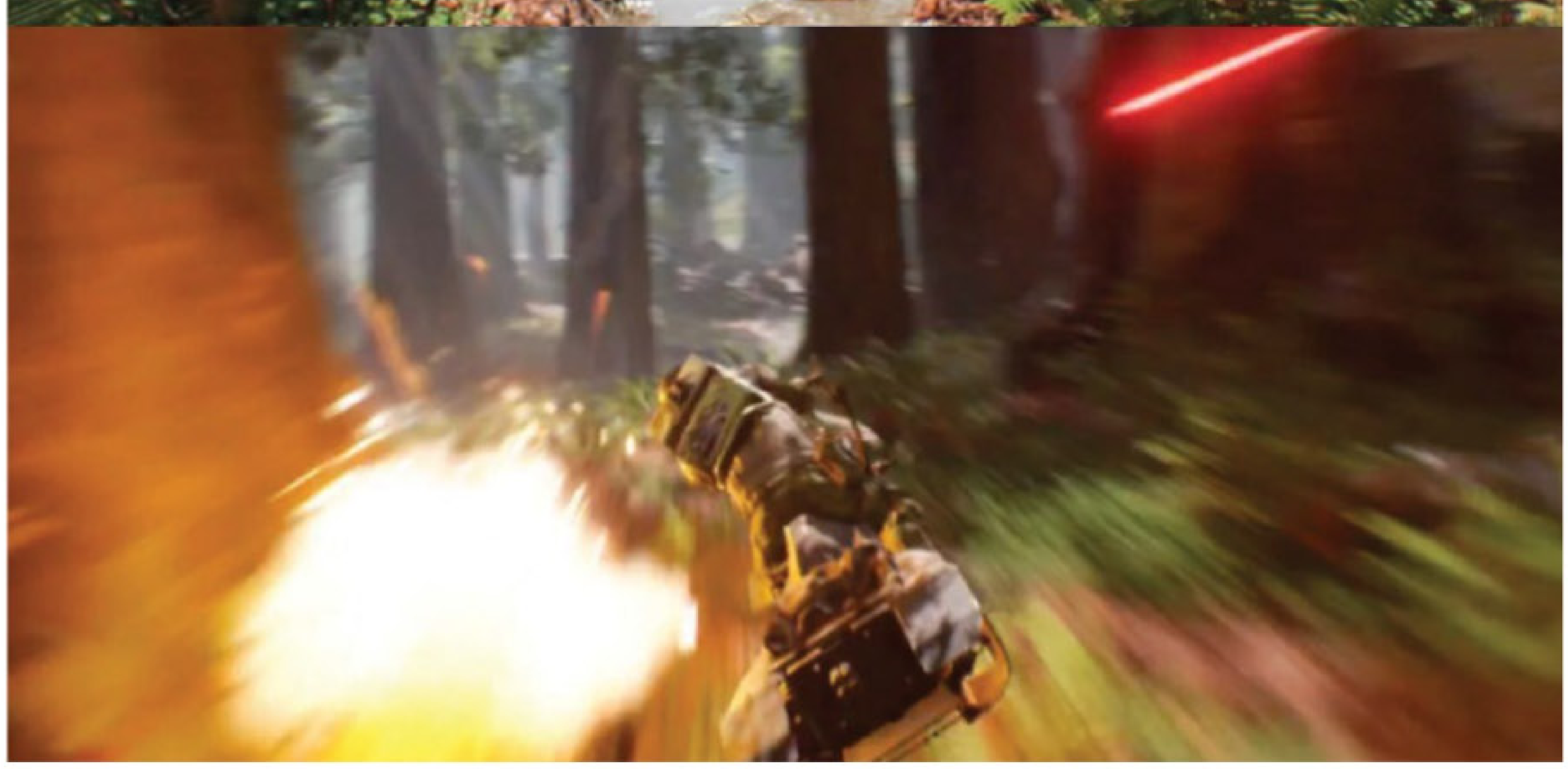
Above: While we're confident that DICE will deliver when it comes to shooting and vehicular combat, however there's a lingering question mark over how it'll approach lightsaber battles.

While the footage that DICE has shown to date amounts to little more than a few *seconds* of admittedly impressive technological showboating that showcases the prowess of the latest iteration of the Frostbite engine, it does give us a couple of hints as to the direction of the Battlefront reboot.

Namely, with Hoth and Endor both being featured in the game, it appears that DICE will be retreading over conflicts that have featured in previous *Battlefront* titles to date. In fact, we'd go out on a limb to suggest that the original trilogy battles will be the focus here, perhaps even filling in some of the gaps between *Revenge Of The Sith* and *A New Hope*.

Clearly reinvention isn't on the cards. This is *Battlefront* as you know it: an ambitious third-person action title enables players to fill the boots of beloved *Star Wars* characters, pilot quintessential vehicles and take part in iconic battles. What this is, in fact, is more akin to George Lucas himself revisiting the franchise with *Episode I*: reimagining the concept for a new generation, taking advantage of the more advanced technology at hand to better envision the extensive universe. While we shouldn't be worried about another *Phantom Menace* on our hands, what we can look forward to is the first videogame to be to encapsulate the spirit, spectacle and magnitude of *Star Wars* from one of the most notable developers in the industry today. It might be coming to our galaxy, but 2015 feels far, far away right now.





Above: Expect to see some of the original trilogy's defining moments replicated, including the attack on Hoth, the battle of Endor and even the original Death Star run.



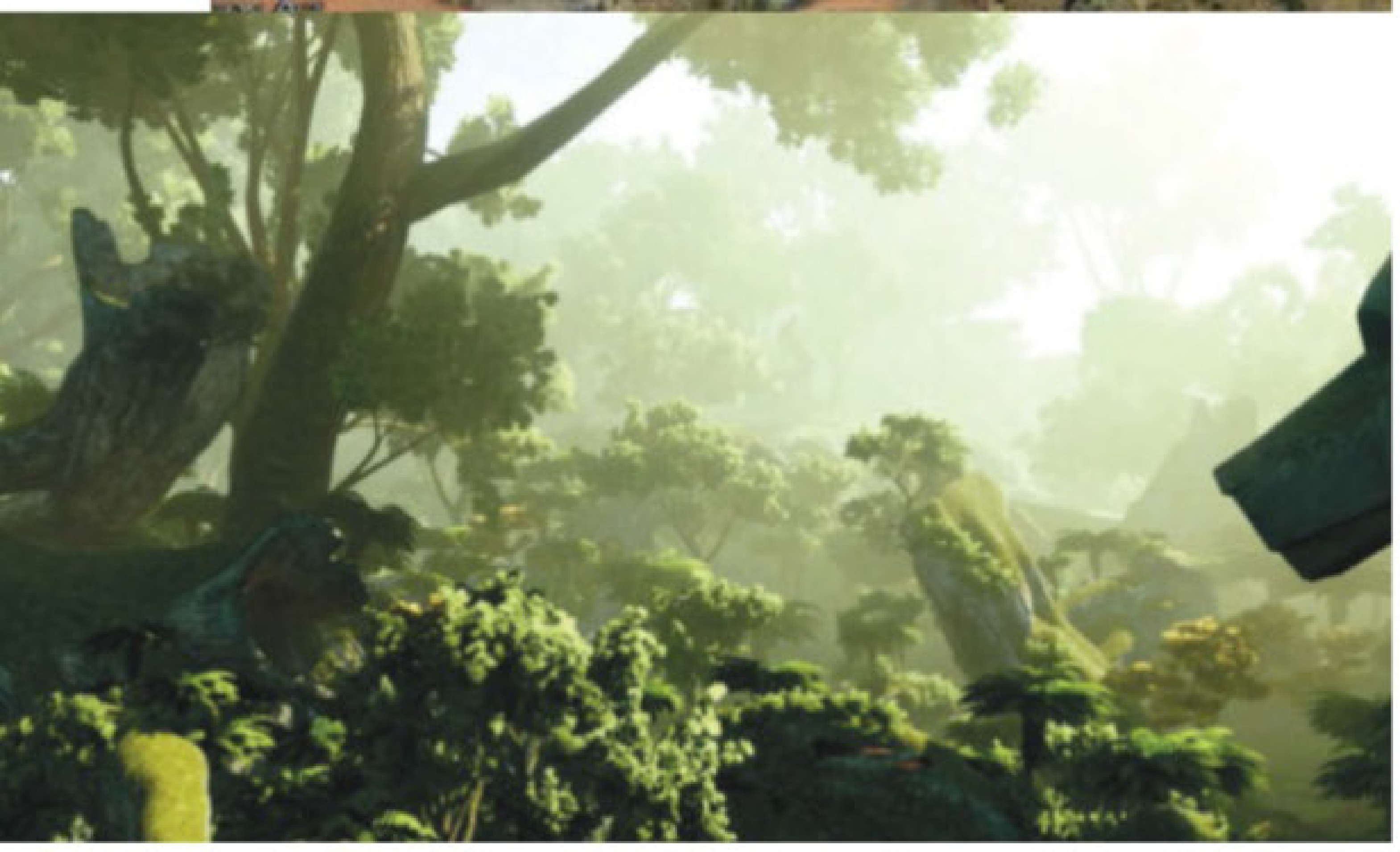
DRAGON AGE: INQUISITION

GAMES™ INTERROGATES DRAGON AGE: INQUISITION PRODUCER CAMERON LEE ON COMBAT AND FACTIONS

Publisher: EA **Developer:** BioWare **ETA:** 7 October

■ Above: There's a deeper tactical combat system in place, balancing the visceral nature of *Dragon Age II* with the overhead strategy of *Origins*. It should appease both sides of the fanbase.





■ Above: As the game utilises the Frostbite 3 engine, destructibility comes as standard. This has combat advantages, enabling players to destroy bridges, gates and crates quickly.

■ WE'VE SEEN DRAGONS. In fact, **games™** has seen lots of dragons. Dragons, like zombies, are videogame staples. But aside from the scaly beasts that'll rain firey death across the vastly expanded continent of Thedas, BioWare has kept gamers in the dark about the next entry in its *Dragon Age* saga. Sitting down with producer Cameron Lee, **games™** gets a better a look at the world of *Dragon Age: Inquisition*.

***Dragon Age II* was a very different beast to *Origins*, and *Inquisition* looks closer to the original, but what key things have been brought from both games?**

We started out by looking at how players used and what they liked about *Dragon Age: Origins* and *Dragon Age II*. We also look at what the market's doing too because it's been so long since those games. When you're planning a game that takes three or four years to make, you have to look ahead and try to predict what might happen.

We did look long and hard at everything, not just at what the core fans want, but also what other fans who don't necessarily talk to us on the forums or on Twitter and we can really gauge a lot of their reactions through the telemetry data that we get.

How did that affect an area as large as combat, for example?

The combat in *Dragon Age: Origins* was very different to its sequel. In *Inquisition*, even if you're running around fighting rather than using the tactical view the combat is slowed down, there's more weight to the animations and impact to the hits. We've brought back the tactical view for all platforms we've improved on it so you can follow your party of characters, zoom in, pan it and get a good feel for the environment as well as hovering over enemies to see info about them, their strengths and weaknesses and stuff like that. Even the action combat is more strategic because you can chop and change at will between characters so you might take your archer up to a cliff face to give him a tactical advantage but the enemy AI is going to react to your strategy by laying traps down and trying to manoeuvre around you.

The sense of scale is enormous and there's clearly a lot to explore but at the same time you have this storyline that suggests a sense of urgency is required. How do you balance those two seemingly opposite notions?

The world is incredibly open now; it's a really big game. The story that we're telling spans



different nations so what we've done is take areas of those nations that make sense of the story and made massive open areas for them.

Because they're themed for the story, we've been able to do is introduce conflicts into those areas, so even when you're just running around and exploring, you're getting that sense of conflict and a glimpse of the consequences of what you're not dealing with in the world. Our world master system understands where you are in the story and the decisions you've made, so even if you've been completely ignoring the story, which you can, you're going to see fade rifts everywhere, Templars and Mages battling each other, a civil war underway and as you start to bring stability to this world you're going to see the world master system adapt and change what's happening around you.

Considering that the game is out in October, we would have thought that we'd see more detail on the game than just presentations; what's the reason for that?

It's a really simple answer! It's really hard to convey the context of the RPG, characters, story and concepts if people just get their hands on it and play it for five minutes. They're missing the context, so that's why we did it this way. What we'll probably do next year is an open theatre-style booth – or the next time we do a *Dragon Age* game – so that people can see it in action but that's really all it is. We have been doing behind-closed-doors for people to get a feel for it, but that's a more intimate one-to-one experience with someone talking you through it.

"THE WORLD IS INCREDIBLY OPEN NOW; IT'S A REALLY BIG GAME"
CAMERON LEE, BIOWARE



MIA

THE VIDEOGAME NO-SHOWS OF 2014



GEARS OF WAR 4

We expected to see the first footage from Black Tusk Studio's *Gears Of War* sequel at E3 earlier in the year, however the game was mysteriously absent from the show. Still, it's early development days for the next outing for Marcus Fenix and his bros. Expect the bug hunt to resume in 2016.



RED DEAD REDEMPTION 2

We've been hearing rumours for months that Rockstar Games' next major release will be a follow-up to 2010's *Red Dead Redemption*. With *Grand Theft Auto V* transitioning to PlayStation 4 and Xbox One, the notion of Rockstar's vision of the American Frontier on new console hardware is irresistible.



HALF-LIFE 3

We live in hope that Gordon Freeman will lift the crowbar once again, it seems like Valve is busying itself with hardware to be too concerned with releasing a game any time soon. As *Steam Box* looks like it'll be pushed to 2015, could *Half-Life 3* be a platform exclusive to end all platform exclusives?



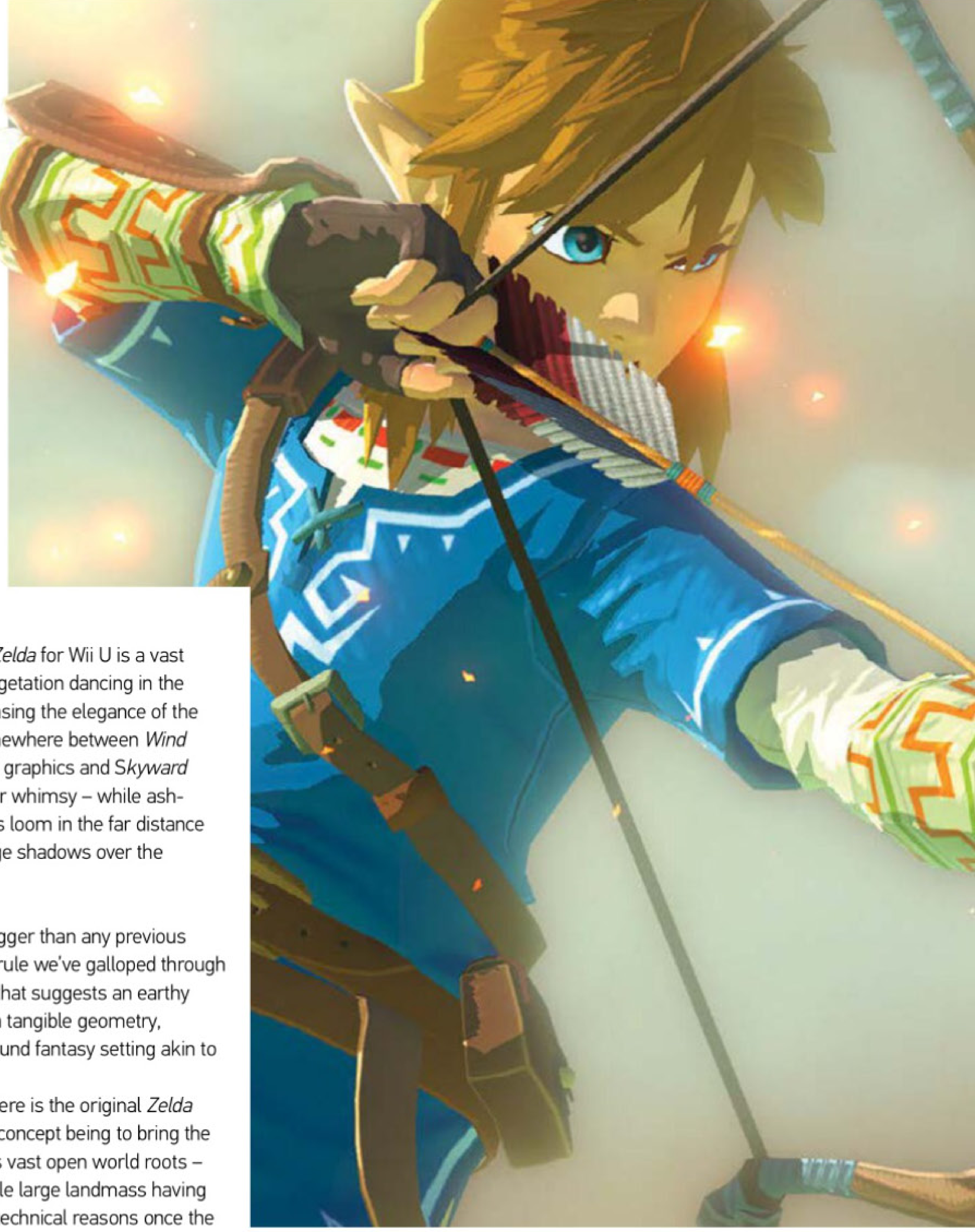
BEYOND GOOD & EVIL 2

Michel Ancel has taken breaks away from the development of the sequel to *Beyond Good & Evil but* the game has been confirmed to have been in active development for over a year and with nothing else on Ubisoft Montpellier's upcoming slate, we expect to hear more by the end of the year.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

THE ZELDA SCROLLS

Publisher: Nintendo **Developer:** In-house **ETA:** Late 2015



HAVE YOU SEEN Link? Well, have you? It seems that the entire gaming community is searching for the Hyrule hero, scrutinising the first sliver of footage from the Wii U's *The Legend Of Zelda* for a familiar sign of the series protagonist.

No green tunic. No Master Sword. A distractingly androgynous mien. Could this be the first *Zelda* game to recast its main star? Could it even promote Zelda herself to headline status?

Despite *Zelda* series producer Eiji Aonuma having dismissed such claims, it no longer feels outside the realm of possibility for the franchise. When **games™** spoke to Aonuma last year during the promotion of the Wii U re-release of *Wind Waker,* the candid overseer stated that the next mainline entry in the franchise would represent a radical departure from the series' roots. Specifically, he highlighted the world of Hyrule as the subject of significant change. "I'd really like the next Hyrule to be a setting no one has ever imagined before," he slyly hinted at the time. Well he wasn't lying. The first image released for *The Legend Of Zelda* for Wii U is a vast open plane, lush vegetation dancing in the foreground, showcasing the elegance of the new art style – somewhere between *Wind Waker*'s cel-shaded graphics and *Skyward Sword*'s watercolour whimsy – while ash-billowing mountains loom in the far distance and clouds cast large shadows over the sprawling terrain.

/// This is clearly bigger than any previous interpretation of Hyrule we've galloped through on horseback, one that suggests an earthy quality outlined by a tangible geometry, buoying a more ground fantasy setting akin to *Ocarina Of Time*.

The inspiration here is the original *Zelda* game on NES. The concept being to bring the franchise back to its vast open world roots – the idea of one single large landmass having to be sacrificed for technical reasons once the series moved into 3D.

With that in mind, players can explore each district of Hyrule in any order they wish, rather than transitioning from area to area

Below Aonuma has stated that he wanted the world of the latest *The Legend Of Zelda* to constantly threaten the player. Expect to find towering enemies stalking Hyrule Field as Link makes his way from one location to the next.







"THIS IS CLEARLY BIGGER THAN ANY PREVIOUS INTERPRETATION OF HYRULE"

■ **Above** The unveiling of the newly-designed Link was the cause of much speculation. Was this the green-clad hero we all know, or was this a reveal that the hero would change gender this time around?



on a relative linear pathway. It's the structural upgrade that has the potential to align Zelda with the titans of open-world game design, such as *The Witcher*, *Dragon Age* and, dare we say it, *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*.

"It was hard to create one large world where everything felt connected," Aonuma said in the announcement video, elaborating on the constraints he faced on previous *Zelda* titles. "As soon as those boundaries are removed it means you can enter any area from any direction."

While it'll no doubt include many of the features that have come to define the series over the years – dungeons, Epona, weird rock-munching denizens – the overhaul to the world map marks a clean break away from convention for the series. It's a clear statement of intent that Link's latest journey will be something entirely different. Those looking for more familiar sights may struggle to see Link through his new duds and refreshed outlook, but we recommend they look closer. This could be the first *Zelda* title in years to live up to the legend.

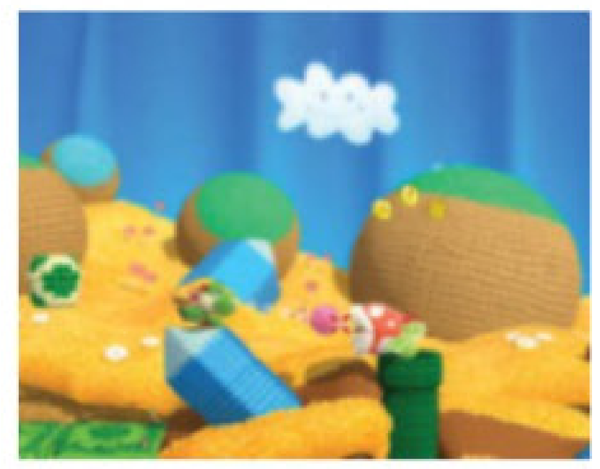
NINTENDO'S SLATE



SPLATOON

Release: 2015 **Developer:** Nintendo

■ One of Nintendo's newly announced IPs is a novel third-person shooter, the gameplay USP being to claim as much territory within the time limit by covering the environment in paint. You can turn into a squid, so there's also that.



YOSHI'S WOOLLY WORLD

Release: 2015 **Developer:** Good-Feel

■ Similar to 2010's *Kirby's Epic Yarn*, this wool-wrapped adventure has Mario's chum reimagined as something your nan knitted. Gameplay is lifted from the *Yoshi's Island*, except Yoshi now lays balls of yarn, which have various uses when thrown.



BAYONETTA 2

Release: October 2014 **Developer:** Platinum Games

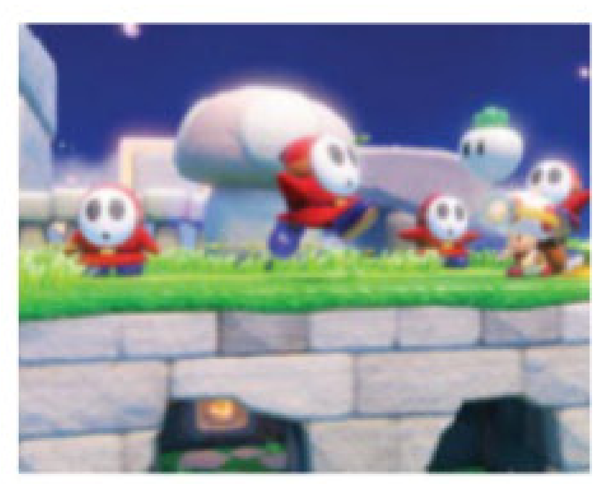
■ As if you didn't know by now, *Bayonetta*'s sequel looks as frantic and bonkers as the original. The good news is that if you aren't familiar with the first entry, it'll be bundled in with the sequel.



MARIO PARTY 10

Release: 2015 **Developer:** Nintendo

■ Much the same as previous *Mario Party* entries, the latest sequel adds new mode: Bowser Party. Here a fifth player as Bowser must catch up with the other contestants and remove all their lives before they reach the end of the board.



CAPTAIN TOAD

Release: TBA 2014 **Developer:** Nintendo

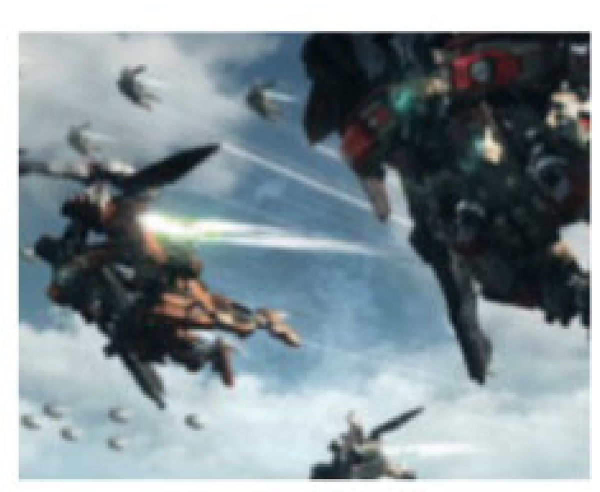
■ Building upon the Captain Toad stages in *Super Mario 3D World*, the intrepid explorer gets his own platform game that involves manipulating the game world to successfully navigate to the finish. It does look like a barrel of laughs though.



KIRBY AND THE RAINBOW CURSE

Release: 2015 **Developer:** HAL Labs

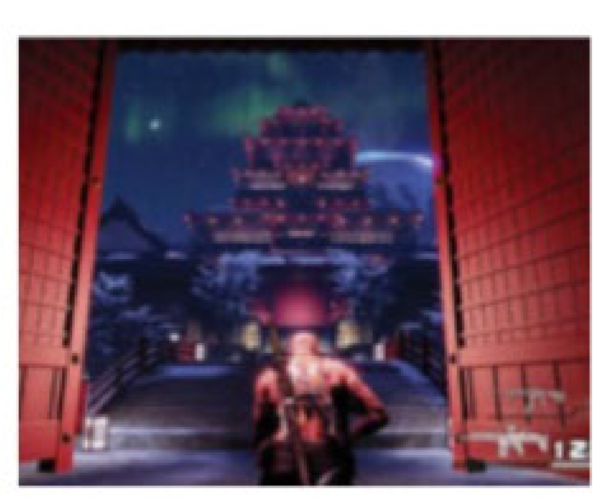
■ As a follow-up to the Nintendo DS' *Kirby: Canvas Curse*, this Wii U sequel is a sort of pinball-puzzle-game hybrid, involving players guiding Kirby in ball form around the game world.



XENOBLADE CHRONICLES X

Release: 2015 **Developer:** Monolith Soft

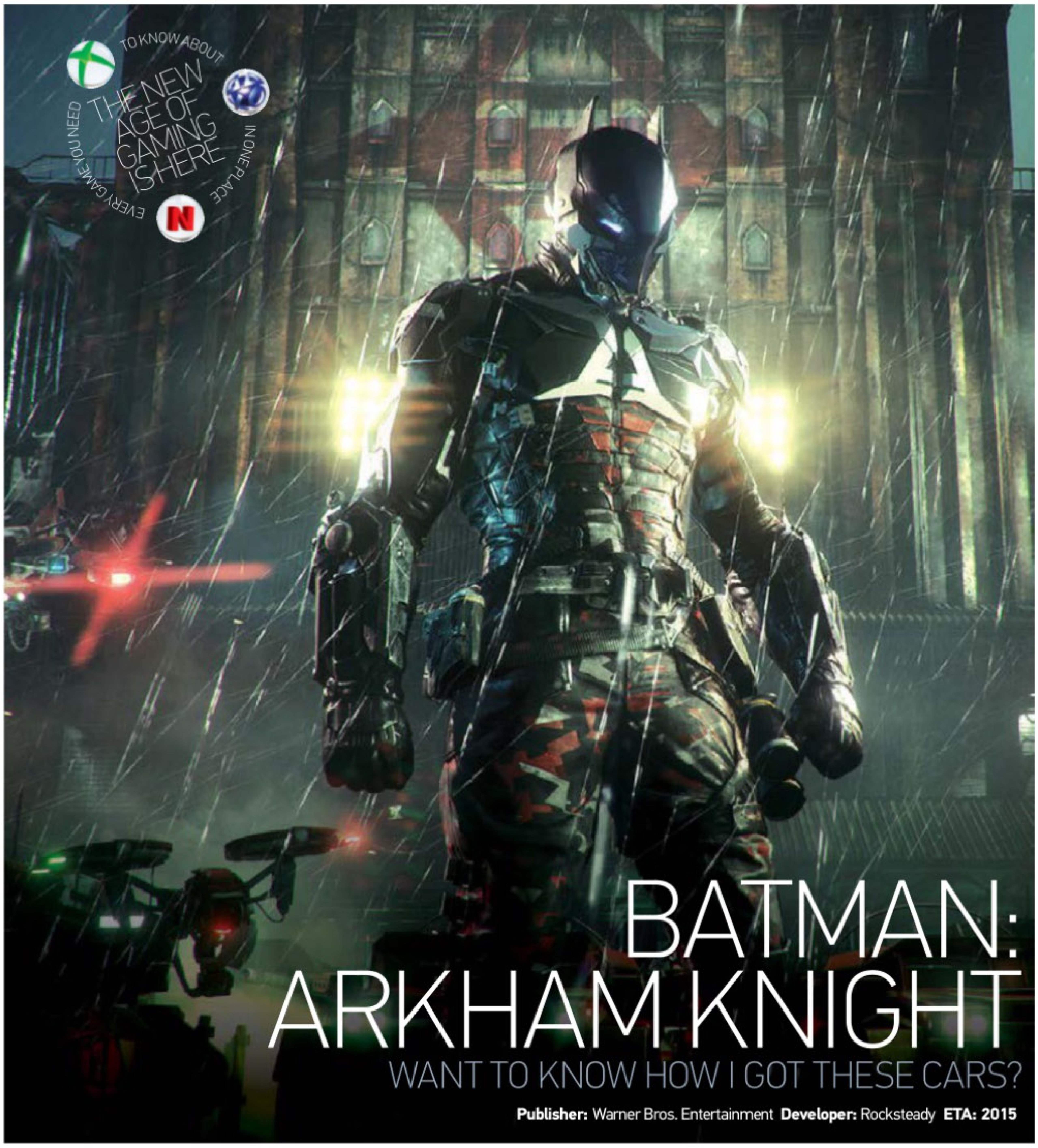
■ Finally confirmed as the sequel to the Wii's *Xenoblade Chronicles*, *X* has players battling in mechs across an expansive fantasy landscape. Footage released didn't blow us away, but we're confident it'll be another deeply immersive RPG.



DEVIL'S THIRD

Release: 2014 **Developer:** Valhalla Game Studios

■ *Dead Or Alive* and *Ninja Gaiden* maestro Tomonobu Itagaki's latest is a third-person shooter exclusively for the Wii U. Footage released resembles a mishmash between *Call Of Duty* and *Ninja Gaiden* set in Japan.



BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT

WANT TO KNOW HOW I GOT THESE CARS?

Publisher: Warner Bros. Entertainment **Developer:** Rocksteady **ETA: 2015**

The Batmobile. That's the big new element to *Arkham Knight*. It's the one vital piece of the Batman formula that has been missing from the studio's previous games, and while *Arkham City* was small enough to get away with the gliding-based traversal, it looks like *Arkham Knight* is going to be big enough to warrant a fully-fledged Batmobile.

Batman's signature car will switch between two modes – Battle mode and Pursuit mode – each suited to different things. Battle mode is, to all intents and purposes, a mix between tank and mech; a manoeuvrable and lethal exoskeleton of Batman, designed to suppress riotous crowds and take down the villains out to get the Dark Knight. Pursuit mode is the more standard means of transport – turning the Batmobile back into the fuel-injected supercar it was made to be. You'll find this mode most suitable for general traversal – getting from one end of Gotham to another.

The Batmobile can be summoned to Bruce's location at will, whenever he's in the city (or even some locations indoors). This will be useful when tackling the Riddler's newest challenges – some of which have been designed specifically to test the mettle of Bats' custom drive. Remember the momentum-based launches you could jump into when gliding around Arkham City? In *Knight*, you can do that straight from the Batmobile itself, using it as a springboard to get an aerial view of the city and subsequently drop down and remove threats from the streets with some all-new takedowns. Right now, *Arkham Knight* is looking like it might as well be called *Grand Theft Auto Batman*… and we can't think of anything bad about that.



Having dual Batmobile modes should allow Rocksteady to keep the pace of the gameplay, resulting in an experience more engaging than previous entries

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BATTLEFIELD: HARDLINE

BETTER WITHOUT THE BETA

Publisher: EA **Developer:** Visceral Games **ETA:** October 21





Above: Ziplines add a new dynamic to the *Battlefield*-style gameplay, more so than the grapple hook, which can only be used in predetermined spots.



"THE *BATTLEFIELD HARDLINE* beta is live!" shouted Visceral Games' Steve Papoutsis from EA's E3 stage, smoke billowing into the air as though a WWE wrestler was about to rush onstage with steel chair in hand. It was one of the few surprises at the annual games show that managed to stay under wraps until EA was good and ready to announce it. Although existence of *Battlefield Hardline* had been previously leaked, eliminating the impact its surprising cops vs. robbers angle would have had when revealed to the world, news of the closed beta was still a shock. There was clear interest too, made evident by *Hardline*'s official site crashing under the influx of players trying to sign up immediately after the announcement.

And yet after playing the beta, the prevailing feeling is that *Hardline* should have stayed undercover for a while longer, as it struggles to establish its own identity away from the *Battlefield 4* framework it's built on. It's a shame because *Hardline* doesn't do anything wrong, per se. The cops and robbers gameplay concept works and feels fresh, with both sides out to nab money from a central point to deposit back at their 'vaults'. There are minor differences between both Heist and Blood Money modes but they do both feel unique, playing out as an intriguing mix of Sabotage, Capture The Flag and Rush game modes.

The mechanics have been tweaked elsewhere, such as how you buy new weapons with cash rather than with level unlocks. You can heal or resupply from team-mates without having to wait for them to throw the relevant kits out first, much needed given how frustratingly selfish and unaware FPS communities can be, and having police cars, motorbikes and SWAT trucks serve as the vehicles is a nice touch. New elements such as grapple hooks and ziplines spice up the *Battlefield 4* formula as well.

There are teething problems you'd expect from a game in its beta stages – the loading is glacial, the user interface is messy, the framerate can chug and the balance has been thrown off-kilter by the rampant camping. The servers have been a little wobbly although nothing like *Battlefield 4* was in its early days – a good sign, but optimism that online issues have been entirely solved is tempered by just how bad *Battlefield 4*'s netcode was at its nadir.

Regardless of the beta issues, however, Hardline's biggest obstacle to success is the feeling that you've already seen it all in *Battlefield 4*. The assets, the sound effects, the destruction, the gameplay, everything is drenched with familiarity that makes the novelty of the cops vs. robbers angle wear off far sooner than it should. It's good fun, but it feels like a *Battlefield 4* mod and the elements don't quite mesh together for an edge-of-your-seat heist in the same way that *Payday 2* manages. The map in the beta is too big and the gameplay is too messy, something that works with for the sprawling war offered in *Battlefield* but doesn't quite translate to the tight claustrophobia needed for a tense cops vs. robbers shootout.

Single-player could be where the package shines, as this is where we're promised twists and turns in the plot and scripting could add a level of excitement to the heists that make them stand out. We certainly hope so because right now, *Hardline* feels more like *Battlefield 4* DLC than a brave new venture.



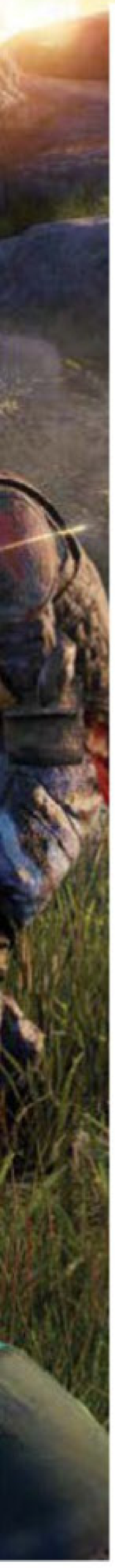
Below: The second player in co-op assumes the role of Hurk – currently the only character to appear in more than one *Far Cry* title.



Below: Pagan Min will receive a voice courtesy of the ubiquitous Troy Baker, who has appeared in roughly all the videogames to date.







FAR CRY 4

MADNESS RETURNS

Publisher: Ubisoft **Developer:** In-house **ETA:** 18 November

HOW MANY GAMES let you ride an elephant? One? Maybe two? Sure, it's been a staple of *Dynasty Warriors* for years, but outside of that franchise it has been a feature that the industry has been widely overlooking. It could be down to a matter of geography.

We're standing atop a rocky clifftop overlooking the snowy peaks of the Himalayas, below us an enemy outpost is teeming with heavily-armed enemies prepped to insert several holes into our living being. We have a few options here... Option One: use a dinky gyrocopter to take the base by air, using a grenade launcher to rain fiery destruction upon the inhabitants scattered below. However, the controls are disorientating – face buttons used for ascending and climbing, while both sticks move and aim your weapon of choice – and the aircraft has the durability of a coke can. It's a bullish gambit and one that will guarantee failure. Option Two is more familiar: using stealth to navigate around the area, using a grappling hook to infiltrate and silently dispatching enemies one by one, allaying any fears that an alarm would be tripped. Armed with an omni-crossbow, this is comfortable territory for *Far Cry 3* veterans, using the environment to your advantage, skulking about in the shadows and taking the base one solider at a time.

> "AN ENEMY OUTPOST IS TEEMING WITH ARMED ENEMIES. WE HAVE A FEW OPTIONS HERE..."

/// It's also far less interesting than Option Three: riding an elephant, crashing through the front gates and spraying bullet fire like a man raging along the edge of sanity. This is *Far Cry*. At least, the one that Ubisoft knows works since the success of the second sequel and its Eighties-machismo-inspired offshoot *Blood Dragon* reinstated the brand's triple-A status. Wildlife will butcher unsuspecting bystanders walking across the mountainous terrain (mongoose!), players can utilise a variety of transportation to swiftly traverse the country of Kyrat (base jumping!) and you'll be wrestling to overthrow the regime of loony despot Pagan Min (Troy Baker!).

The latter is the focal point of *Far Cry 4*, much like Vaas chewed scenery in each of his appearances in the previous entry. Although, not many were left concerned with how Ubisoft would handle the villain; a more pressing concern is the protagonist. However, far from the charisma vacuum that was Jason Brody, who fell from the sky to infiltrate the world as an outsider, the people's saviour this time is Ajay Ghale – native to the land of Kyrat, and a man with deep motivations.

Not that you'll be alone in the bloody revolution. PlayStation 4 users are able to download a *Far Cry 4* app that enables them to be invited into the games of friends who own the full game. This mode will be slightly tweaked compared to the solo experience, Ubisoft ramping up the difficult for those that try to tackle the game with a partner in tow – whether through tougher AI or just an influx of enemies on the screen.

There's plenty to do in *Far Cry 4*, even if it isn't particularly big on originality. But when you can ram an elephant into the side of a jeep, we ask the question: does it really matter?



UNTITLED CRITERION GAME

SPEED RACING







It was only a few months ago that Criterion Games announced that it was stepping away from racing games to focus on other genres. It turns out the statement wasn't entirely true.
Rather than remove itself from driving games altogether, its latest untitled project involves cars – in fact more cars than ever before. But in addition to that there are helicopters, boats, snowmobiles and almost any other vehicle you can possibly imagine.

There are no details on the actual *game* part of the project – Criterion has yet to reveal whether it's a racing or story-driven action game. We do know that the entire game will be first-person and that players are able to jump from one vehicle to another – one particularly impressive piece of prototype footage involves a character jumping from a helicopter cockpit onto a quad bike.

There's also a vast array of terrains, from mountainous regions buried in snow, to capacious canyons and dense forests. Criterion's penchant for destruction matched with the core concept of its next venture promises a more expansive version of the studio's previous work. It's almost irrelevant whether it marks a change in genre; this is undoubtedly the biggest game the studio has ever made and clearly one of the most creatively liberating.



LITTLEBIGPLANET 3

THE MORE THE MERRIER

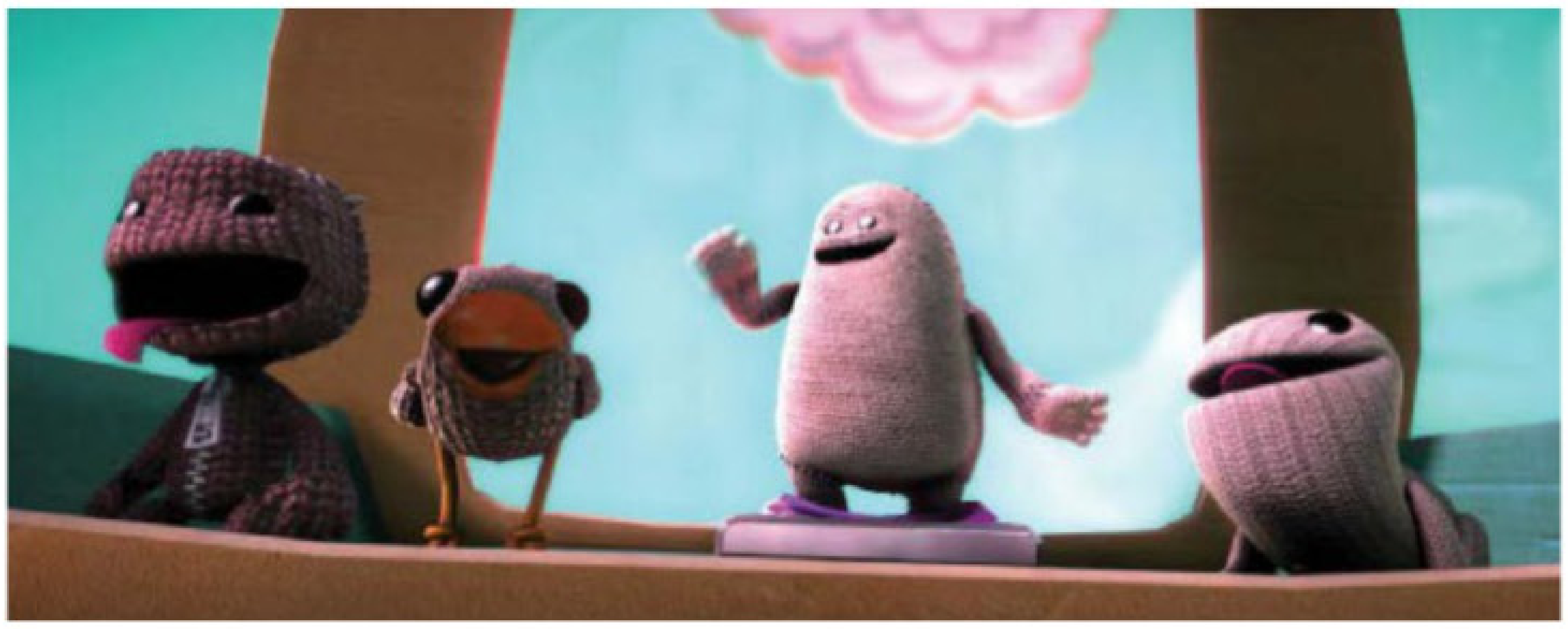
■ The first level of the game acquaints you with Toggle and how its mechanics work – a tap of L1 will shift sizes, allowing the character a plethora of functions

Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment **Developer**: Sumo Digital **ETA:** November 2014

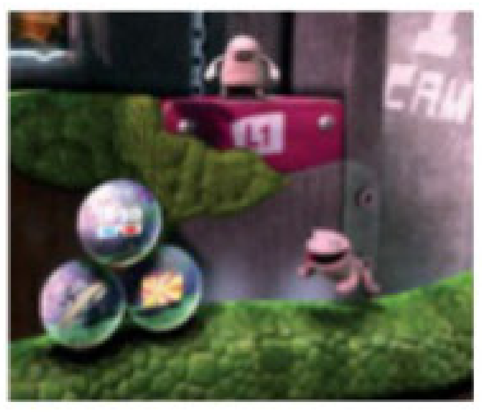
■ MEDIA MOLECULE TURNED heads when it launched the *LittleBigPlanet* franchise – it was a refreshing and interesting take on the typical platformer, with an emphasis on creativity and a respect for the player that few games communicate quite so well. The third entry in the main series will see Sumo Digital take over as custodians of the series, but from the gameplay demonstrations we've seen so far… that doesn't seem to be a problem. The game retains the iconic Sackboy – whose movements and functions remain the same – but gives him some new buddies to play with. There will most certainly be an emphasis on co-op here; now there are more characters with their own unique characteristics, *LittleBigPlanet 3* promises to be as much of a puzzler as it is a platfomer.

You'll have to get used to Oddsock, a four-legged dog-like sock puppet, who's got a quicker gait than Sackboy and can bound off walls. There's also Swoop – a yarn-y bird – that can freely fly around the planet (remember the jet-pack levels in 2? We reckon it'll handle similarly). Swoop can pick up other characters and light items, effectively making it the Tails to Sackboy's Sonic. Then there's Toggle and its two forms, too: Big Toggle and Little Toggle, which can be flipped between at will. Big Toggle can use his bulk to sink platforms or activate pressure pads, whilst Little Toggle is small enough to slide through cracks in the craft-work world and even walk across water (think Yoshi in *Yoshi's New Island*).

Hopefully Sumo Digital will retain the ingenuity of Media Molecule in putting the *LBP* world together, and giving players the tools to create levels of their own design. It seems Sumo realises how imperative a function this is for fans of the series,



> "LBP3 PROMISES TO BE AS MUCH OF A PUZZLER AS A PLATFORMER"



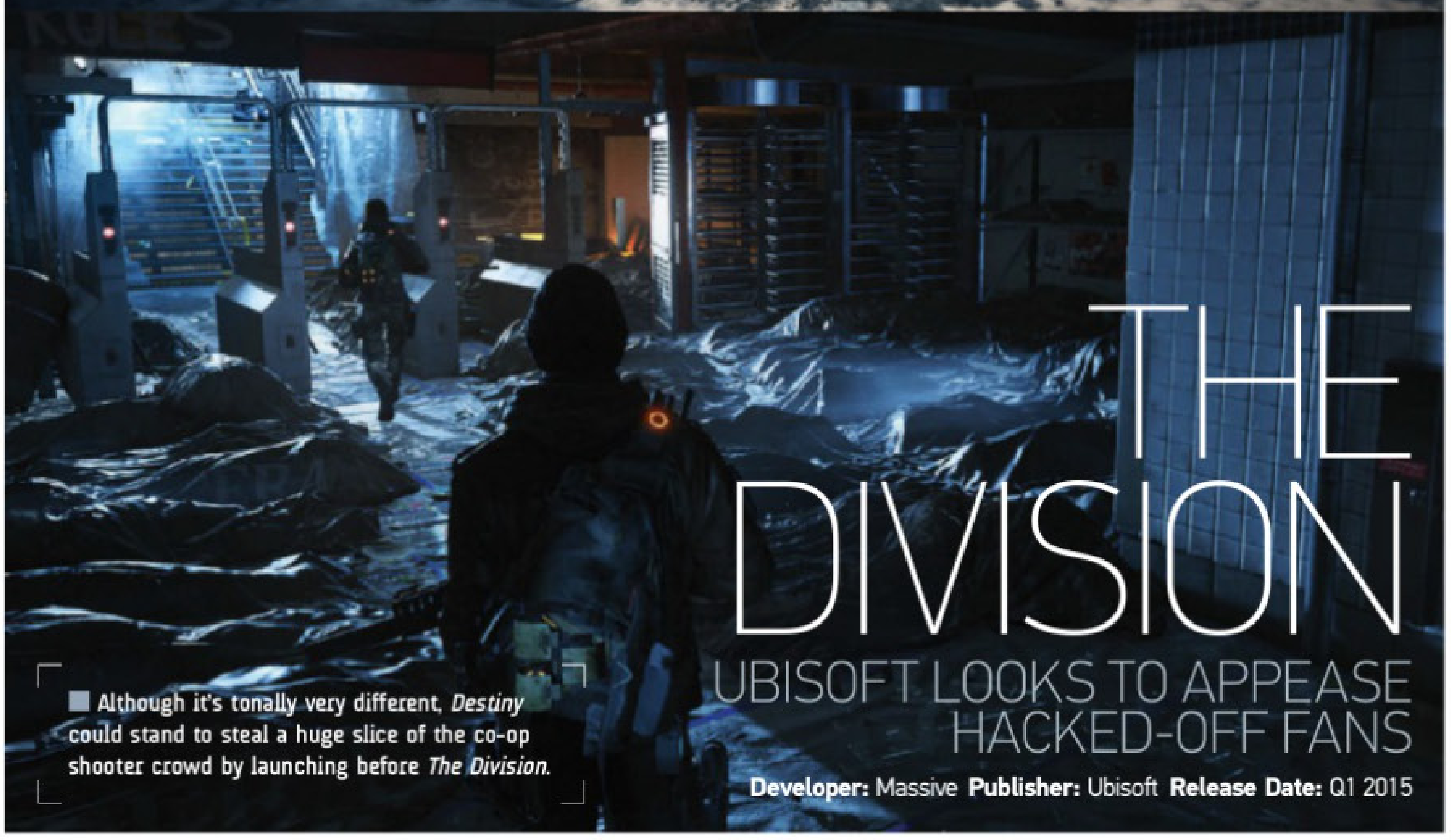
■ We're happy to see that all the characters can be dressed up and customised as much as Sackboy – another *LittleBigPlanet* trope Sumo has successfully honoured.

though; releasing on both PS3 and PS4, the game won't isolate audiences, and returning players can import levels made in the original and its sequel directly into 3 – even using the PS4's engine to improve the textures of anything imported.

It seems that with the new cast of characters, Sumo is insistent on giving players all the mechanics they'll need to create a game that can emulate pretty much any platfomer released in the last few years… except maybe *Super Meat Boy*. The announcement that Media Molecule has moved on to other properties is a shame, but Sumo look perfectly able to carry on the legacy established by the PS3 wünder-developer.







THE DIVISION

UBISOFT LOOKS TO APPEASE HACKED-OFF FANS

Developer: Massive **Publisher:** Ubisoft **Release Date:** Q1 2015

Although it's tonally very different, *Destiny* could stand to steal a huge slice of the co-op shooter crowd by launching before *The Division*.

AS MUCH AS we loved how *Watch Dogs* turned out, we're well aware that opinion is somewhat divided. So while we're still incredibly excited for *The Division*, those who felt let down by Ubisoft when the hype train was derailed last time (those darn kids and their smartphones…) are probably struggling to buy into what we'd describe right now as *Tom Clancy's Borderlands* for fear of being burned again. It's fair enough really, although we'd argue that the gameplay shown thus far for this new shooter/RPG hybrid speaks for itself. Which makes us wonder even more why every stage demo the game has enjoyed to date has apparently needed pretend online chatter.

The Division doesn't need this nonsense. The premise alone – a fusion of cover shooter gameplay, RPG skill progression and loot drops, and social gameplay that transcends consoles and controllers – is incredible, and the crumbling Manhattan setting only helps reinforce the fact that its setup is actually pretty believable and makes logical sense. Well, compared to other recent Ubisoft classics such as *Aiden And The Magic Phone* or *Desmond's Time Bed Adventures*, anyway. *Watch Dogs* needs to be a lesson in marketing to Ubisoft and much as it pains us to say it, the less we see of *The Division* before launch day rolls around, the better. We're sold on the concept already, and we don't need to see – or, heaven forbid, hear – any more.



FORZA HORIZON 2

CALLING DJ STRYKER… ALL IS FORGIVEN

The 360 version of *Horizon 2* is developed by Sumo Digital, runs on the original *Horizon* engine and lacks dynamic weather and Drivatar features.

Developer: Playground Games
Publisher: Microsoft
Release Date: October 2014



MULTIPLE DEVELOPMENT CYCLES within the same franchise are becoming something of a standard for the major players. Assuming it continues as it appears it will, Turn 10 and Playground Games' joint custody of the *Forza* series might just be the best example of the formula seen, with each team offering a new twist on the franchise every year. Playground's vision initially seemed at odds with Turn 10's attention to detail, but it came good – music aside, *Horizon* turned out to be one of the best open world racers on 360 and this Xbox One sequel promises to build on those strong foundations. Moving from America to southern Europe gives a whole new flavour to the open world map, around triple the size of the original. The car count has enjoyed similarly healthy growth, though this does mean that Turn 10 will need to pursue creative ways of making additional vehicles feel necessary – you never needed more than a handful of *Horizon*'s cars to do more or less everything. Enhanced social elements should do their bit here, with meets and events allowing online players to hook up, and Drivatar tech allowing the AI to cosplay as players on your friend list while they're offline. Playground Games is fast making a name for itself…



We're hoping the game plays with more fluidity than its predecessor. What we're after, really, are Partridge levels of 'liquid football'

"YOUR PLAYERS WILL NOW 'GET EMOTIONAL', MUCH LIKE REAL FOOTBALLERS"

FIFA 15

GET YOUR TACKLE OUT

Publisher: EA **Developer:** EA Sports **ETA:** 26 September

FIFA GAMES ATTRACT a lot of criticism – slated for pumping out the same old game, year on year. With *15*, though, EA Sports seems to have taken a good hard look at the new engine it'll be using on next-gen devices and thought about exactly what the new processing power will allow it to do.

For a start, your players will now 'get emotional', much like real footballers (remember when Gazza cried?) Although we don't think EA is going to push emotions that far, dirty play will get players riled up, incessant missed chances will get them frustrated, bad tackles will see them start getting a bit shirty. It's all cosmetic – there'll be no weird metagame in stressing your foes out – but still, it's a nice touch.

Other revisions include bespoke animations for certain crowds, more of a focus on the mathematical statistics of players (meaning slower but more refined teammates actually *feel* skilful now – that speed isn't everything), a completely revised tackling system and significantly improved player AI (both on yours and the opponents team). Overall, it looks like the overhaul *FIFA* needs - especially after the divisive *14*'s release last year.



PGA TOUR 15

GETTING INTO THE SWING OF THINGS

Publisher: EA Sports **Developer:** EA Tiburon **ETA:** Q4 2014

EVER PLAYED A game of golf that got a bit boring? Let's be honest, it's a likelihood, right? Well don't worry, because in *PGA Tour 15*, there are a variety of things that can liven up any given game. Like battleships, for example. Because the game's powered by the Frostbite 3 engine, EA Tiburon has been able to take assets from the *Battlefield* team – the result being the ship from the Paracel Storm map cropping up during a vanilla game of golf. EA is selling *PGA Tour 15* with the tagline 'golf without limits' – a ridiculous tagline if ever we heard one – but should this level of madness continue, we'll certainly be more interested.



NHL 15

BLOOD ON THE ICE

Publisher: EA Sports **Developer:** EA Canada **ETA:** September 2014

EA CANADA HAS been one of the best performing studios under the EA Sports umbrella for a while now, and that trend looks set to continue with the release of *NHL 15*. The main focus of this year's offering is the addition of physics – physics *everywhere*. Rather than animations powering the players, the physics engine will be applied to every point of contact on their bodies, allowing your team to move, hit and fall like they realistically would. Now, when you slam your opponents into the walls or sweep your stick around another players legs, you'll hopefully get the crunchy impacts and faceplants you'd expect to see in a real hockey game. Nice.

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MORTAL KOMBAT X

■ This imposing behemoth is Kotal Kahn, a new fighter whose place in the universe is currently the topic of debate in the office. We reckon he's Shao Khan's son, or test-tube baby, or something.

GET (BACK) OVER HERE

Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment
Developer: NetherRealm Studios **ETA:** 2015

■ YOU DON'T TEND to play fighting games for their story, but *Mortal Kombat* is the one exception to that rule; its labyrinthine, ridiculously over-the-top plot is one of the things fans find so endearing about the franchise, and it does a good job of fleshing out the inventive and eclectic roster the game is (in)famous for featuring. It's a good job, then, that the new game has an original and in-depth storyline, that promises to focus on series stalwarts Scorpion and Sub-Zero, whilst weaving their tale together with a wider tale of good and evil.

But that's not the only rejig the series is getting for its tenth main entry. The UI has seen a radical overhaul, and is now crisper and cleaner than the clunky affair that decorated the 2009 *Mortal Kombat*. There are also some new characters making an appearance; D'Vorah, an insect-based humanoid who can control all kinds of bugs; Ferra/Torr, a masked goliath with a small girl on his shoulders; and Cassie Cage – the daughter of Sonya Blade and Johnny Cage, alongside more that are as yet unannounced. *Mortal Kombat X* will run on a modified version of the Unreal Engine 3 and see a release across new and last generations.



■ It's nice to see Crystal Dynamics has kept its attention to graphical fidelity alive in moving over to the sequel. On this and last-gen, Lara promises to look more lifelike than before.

RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

GAMING'S PRODIGAL SPELUNKER RETURNS

Publisher: Square Enix **Developer:** Crystal Dynamics **ETA:** 2015

■ IF YOU'D BEEN marooned on an island full of savage cultists on an island somewhere off the coast of Japan, and had subsequently been mauled by wolves, impaled by spiky metal poles, betrayed by your friends and forced to kill to ensure your own survival, chances are you'd be a bit… mentally delicate. Especially if you'd done all of this in your first month out of Uni. Lara Croft is only human, and in the direct sequel to 2013's hit, she's sought out a therapist to help her get over the utter madness that went down in the Dragon's Triangle. In terms of gameplay, details are still scant, but it's likely Crystal Dynamics won't stray too far away from the formula that re-validated the *Tomb Raider* franchise last year. There'll still be a focus on exploration and survival, and we're likely to see a more hardened Lara – *Tomb Raider* itself was, after all, a reboot and an origin story, so it'll be interesting to see how Crystal has decided to push her narrative on, especially after doing such a stellar job of chronicling her transformation from young and naive to hardened survivalist in the first part of the reboot.



"THE COMBAT WILL BUILD ON THE COMPLEXITY OF THE WITCHER 2, RELYING ON DECISIVE STRIKES"

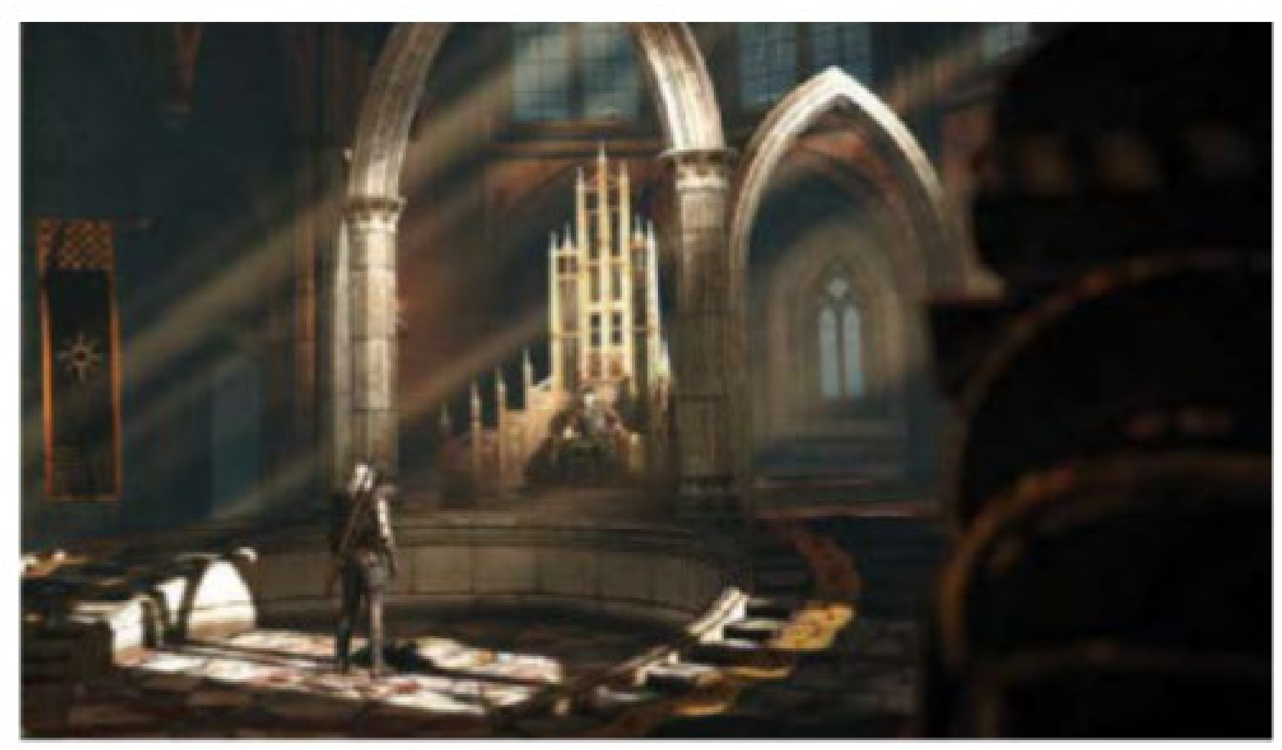
THE WITCHER 3 POLAND'S FINEST CULTURAL EXPORT RETURNS

Publisher: Bandai Namco **Developer:** CD Projekt RED **ETA:** 24 February 2015

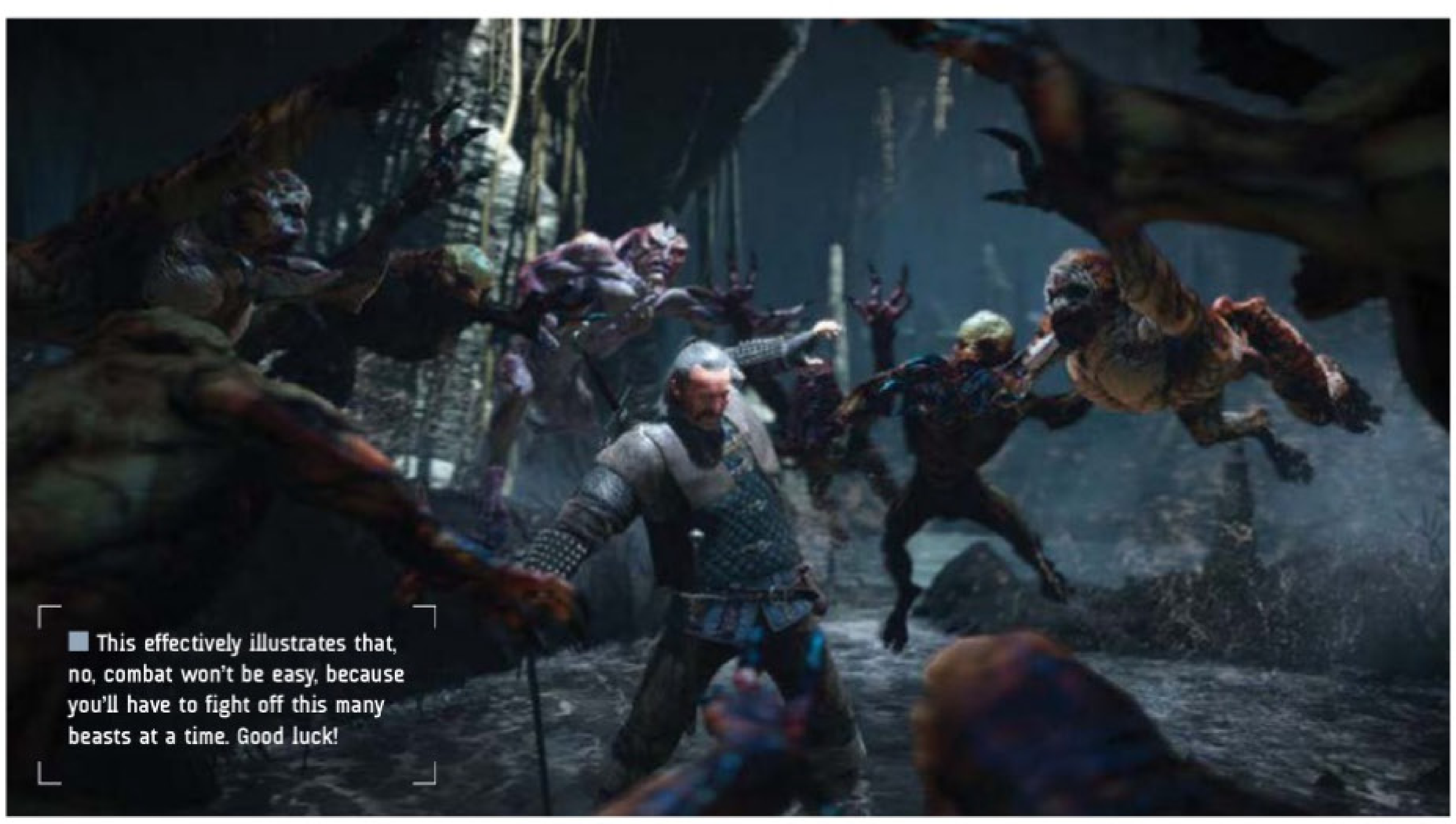
WE RECENTLY HAD chance to play *The Witcher 3*, and it was easy. Worryingly easy. We were told the demo was set ten hours into the main game, where white-haired Witcher mainstay Geralt wanders into the brutal wilderness to kill a griffin. In *The Witcher 2*, you could expect battles to take a while, and if you weren't concentrating you were liable to fall foul to a single attack or two that could leave you utterly devastated, blindsiding you and setting you back a fair while. But in *The Witcher 3*... we managed to take down the griffin in a matter of a few hits with our greatsword, and a smattering of arrows from our crossbow. Granted, we were buffed up on a slew of potions, but still. An ambushing unit of bandits happened upon us, too, and we cleaved them in twain with relative ease, too.

We were told post-battle, however, that the difficulty had been bumped down for this session in order to help players like us get to grips with the systems quicker. Sped up to show us the way to execute your enemies, and to allow for a better scope of Geralt's world; we were reassured that the combat would build on the complexity of *The Witcher 2*, relying on a combination of ducks, dodges, defences and decisive strikes to come out on top. That said, *The Witcher 2* attracted criticism for being fairly inaccessible – there was a difficulty spike around four hours in that many players struggled to overcome.

CD Projekt RED has promised that won't be the case this time around; that although the game is hard, the journey to the highest difficulty point will be incremental, guiding the player, not goading them. The game will also cater for those unfamiliar with Witcher mythology, teaching newcomers about the mechanics and backstory in tandem – a much more subtle approach than *The Witcher 2*'s 'Jump in!' philosophy. It'll be interesting to see how this attempt to form a bridge between loyal fans and newcomers translates to gameplay – usually there's a trade-off somewhere, and we just hope CD Projekt RED is prepared.



We may have been watching too much *Game Of Thrones*, but doesn't it look like there'll be a Moon Door opening up beneath Geralt in this screen?



This effectively illustrates that, no, combat won't be easy, because you'll have to fight off this many beasts at a time. Good luck!

Below: This latest addition to the *Call Of Duty* series is certainly different to its previous counterparts. The game, developed by Sledgehammer Games, has been given a total reboot, with a shot of adrenaline pumped straight into the heart of the game's weapons.



CALL OF DUTY: ADVANCED WARFARE

ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH

Publisher: Activision **Developer:** Sledgehammer Games **ETA:** 4 November

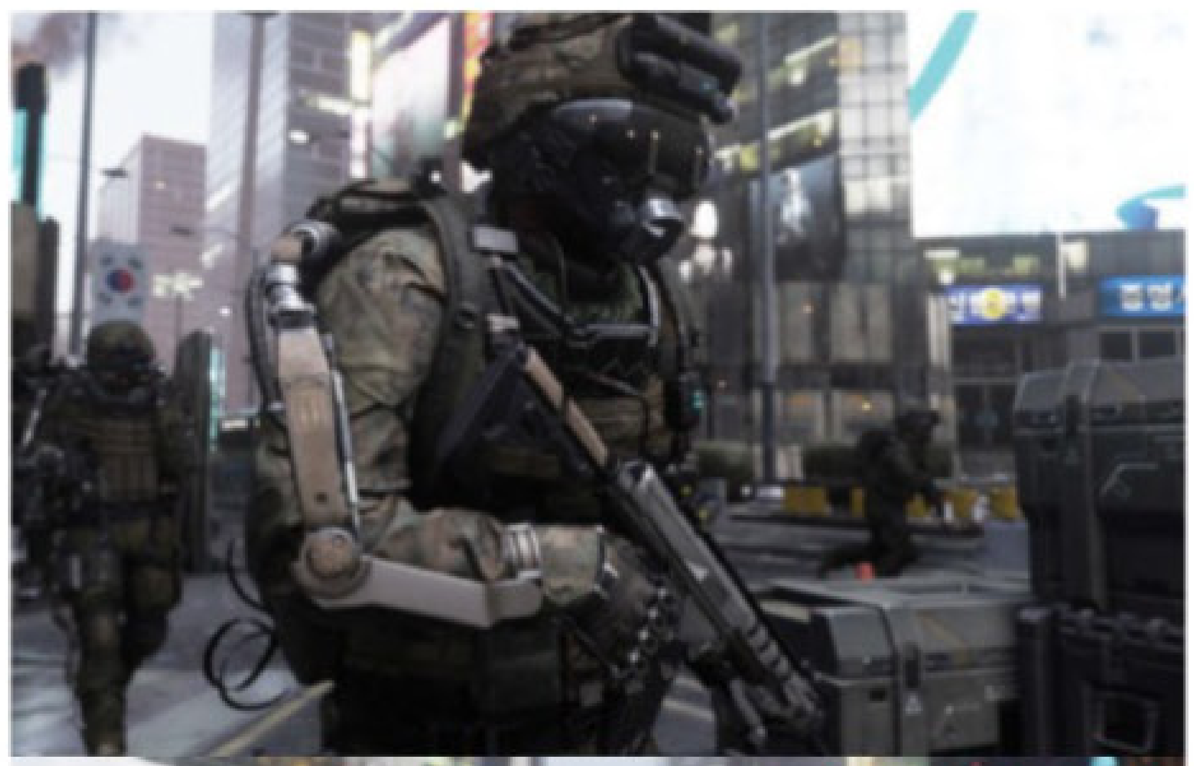
THERE'S SOMETHING DIFFERENT about *Call Of Duty* this year. No, we're not talking about the incremental visual spit shine; neither are we focusing solely on the new gadgets entering the ebb and flow of combat. In this instance, the main point of interest comes down to a matter of attitude.

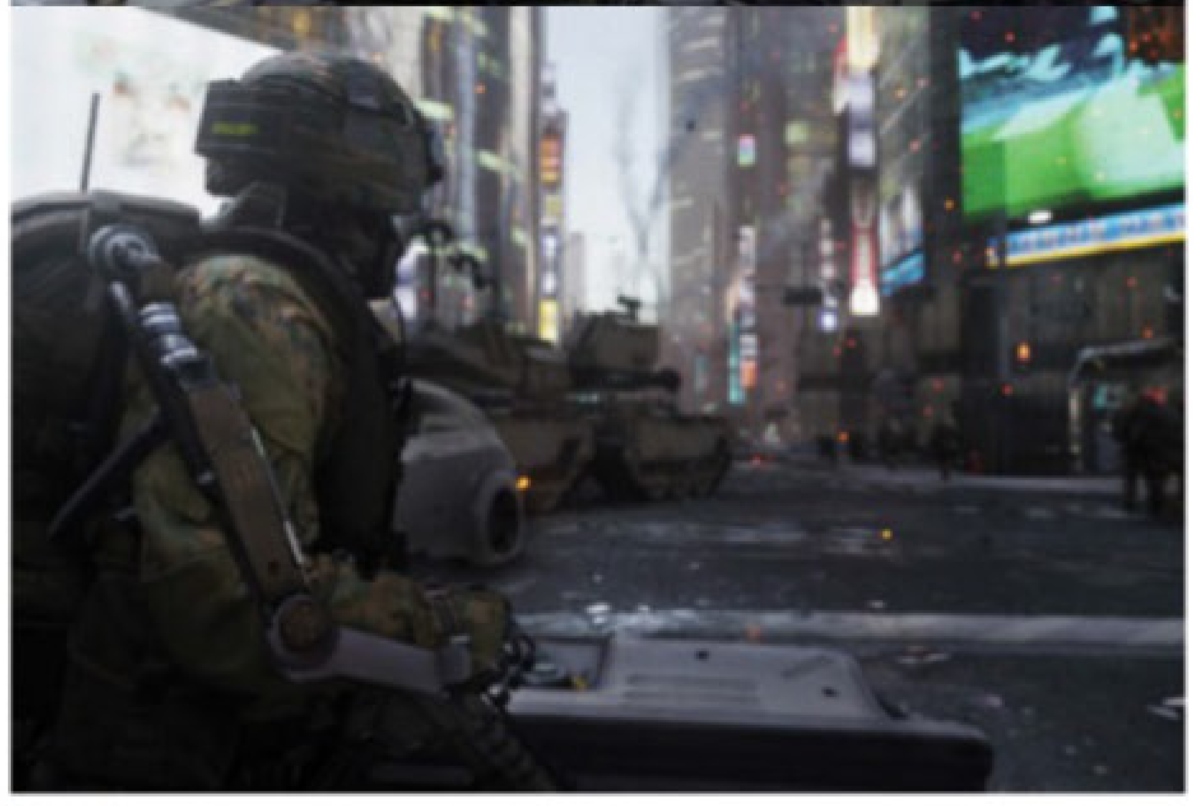
For a series that is constantly under the firing line of media cynicism, it might surprise some to learn that the *Advanced Warfare* has been in development for the past three years in the California-based Sledgehammer Games – the studio's first solo *COD* title after it aided Infinity Ward on *Modern Warfare 3*. *Advanced Warfare* wants to leave its own mark on the franchise, with the first order of business being to install some narrative stability. For once, the emphasis is on one protagonist, who you'll follow throughout the game's campaign. There are no flashbacks here, nor is there any crisscrossing between multiple characters undertaking missions on across various continents. Sledgehammer has stated that it wants to tell the most engaging and compelling story featured in the franchise to date, and the focus on one protagonist is a sure step in the right direction.

We all know you're here for one thing and that's the boom and the studio continues the series' bombastic tradition while adding its own flavour. One mission, entitled Bio Lab, bolsters the stealth mechanics only briefly seen in the series to date. Using a stealth cloak and navigating around enemies, it would be unrecognisable if it weren't for the fact that the unnecessary hand-holding still clings to some of *COD*'s least desirable design traits.

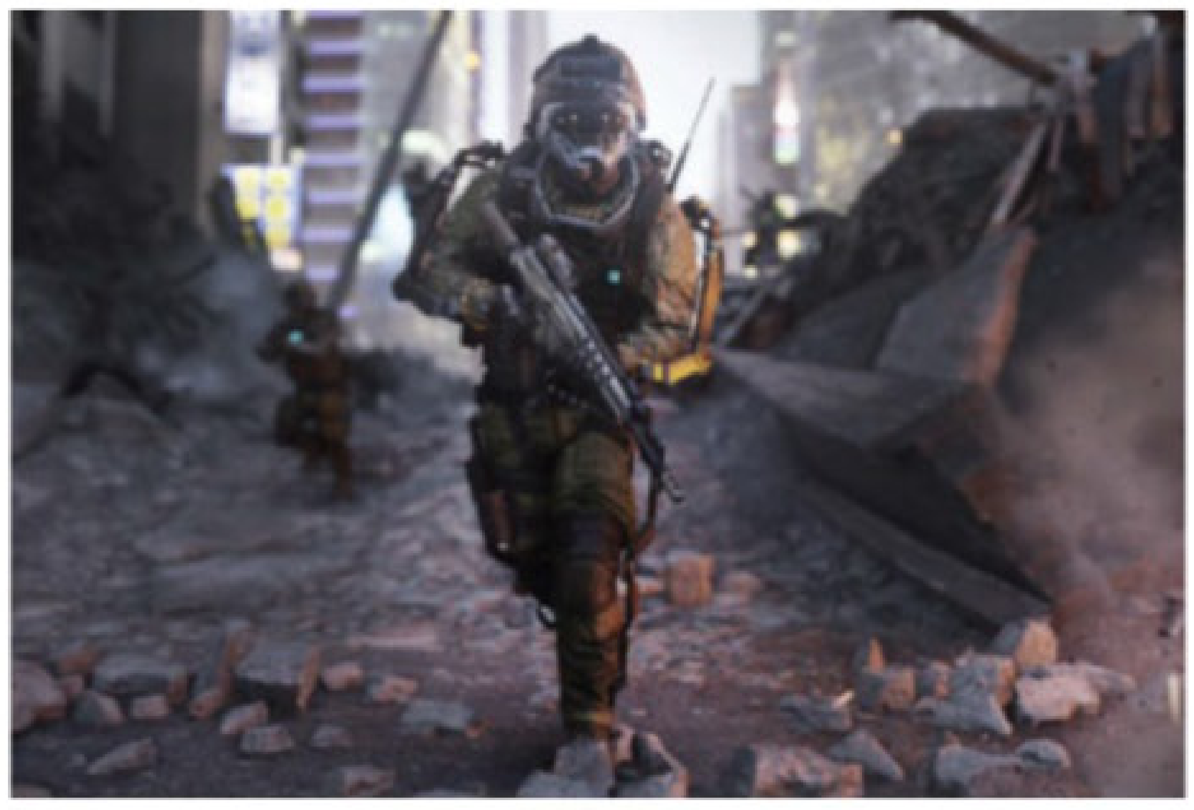
/// Traditional shooting has been given a shot of adrenaline too. Chief among the enhancements in this field is the exoskeleton, adding a new dimension and verticality to the gameplay, while enhancing player abilities substantially – comparison's to *Titanfall* are unfortunately valid. Still, EXO suits will also boast their own skill tree – essentially dragging multiplayer's celebrated RPG mechanics into the single-player campaign. Smaller tweaks like weapon-integrated HUD and multi-purpose grenades make for a slicker experience on the field.

With a new engine and a studio willing to bring fresh ideas into the fray, *Advanced Warfare* has the potential to galvanise the franchise creatively. *Call Of Duty* isn't turning its back on the all-encompassing destruction and the cacophony of warfare that rings between its ears, but this year's entry has matched the explosions with a clarity of vision that makes it an interesting proposition.





Below: The game is taken on from the perspective of one main protagonist, which you will follow through the entire game.





"LET CRACKDOWN GO BACK TO BEING WHAT IT'S BEST AT: POLICE BRUTALITY SIMULATOR"

CRACKDOWN

PUTTING THE AGENCY BACK INTO GAMES

Publisher: Microsoft Studios **Developer:** Cloudgine **ETA:** TBA

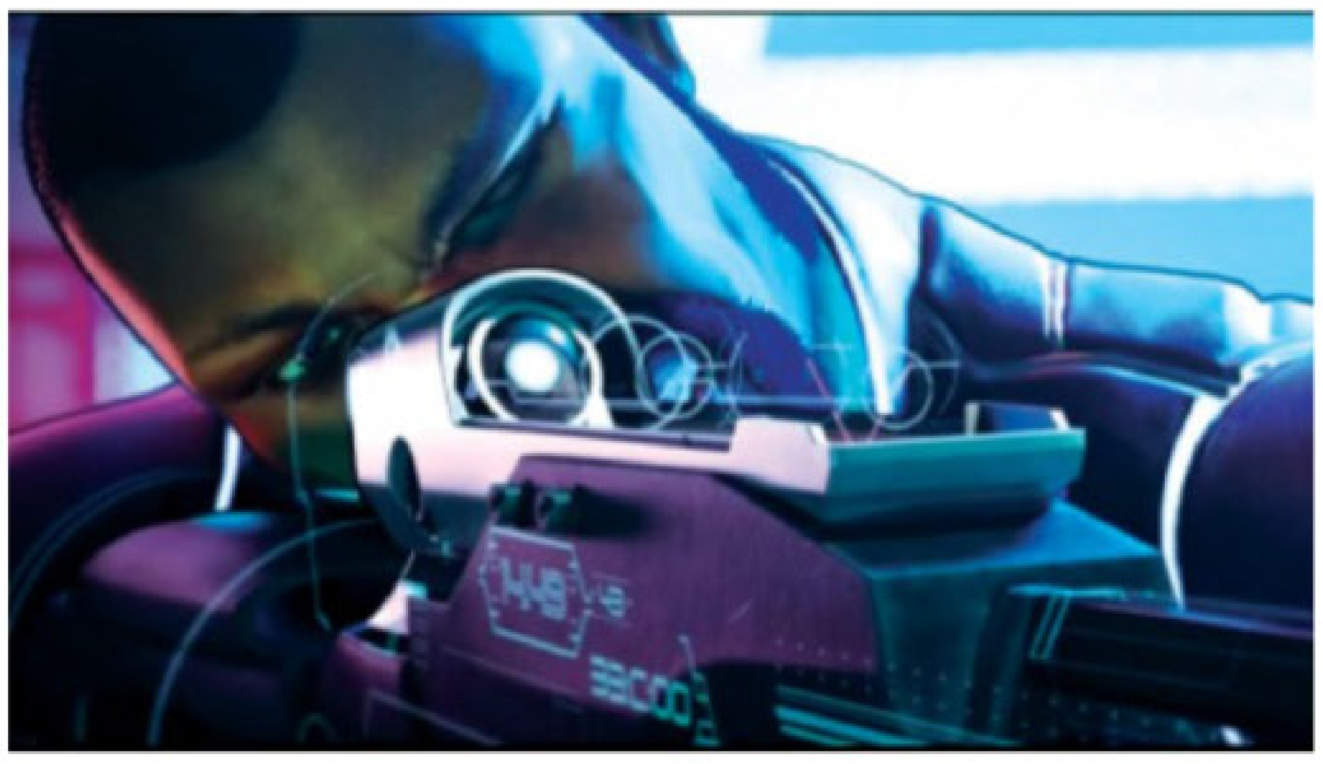
BACK ON THE Xbox 360, *Crackdown* helped define the sandbox game for a new generation. Dave Jones and his team at Realtime Worlds (and later, Ruffian) brought a new spin on the sandbox genre – creating a chimera experience of open-world freedom and PlayStation era platforming. The colours, creativity and cartoon silliness of *Crash Bandicoot* or *Croc* or *Spyro* were kept alive spiritually while the cities and skylines of *GTA* were wrangled to fit a whole new kind of game.

Microsoft hasn't forgotten one of the most important exclusives the 360 ever received, thankfully. Headed up once again by David Jones, this time in Dundee-based studio Cloudgine, the newest *Crackdown* seems more like a reboot than a straight-up, honest-to-goodness sequel. We're not too bothered by that, though – *Crackdown 2* and its DLC completely skewed the canon of the Agency and their world a little too far away from what effectively makes a good *Crackdown* game: the whole zombie apocalypse thing is better suited to *Sunset Overdrive*, so let *Crackdown* go back to being what it's best at: Police Brutality Simulator.

Now, that sounds a little close to the bone, right? A little controversial? That's kind of the point – from what we've seen of the game so far, it looks like Cloudgine isn't scared of putting you in the shoes of an action-hero of a cop that has no reservations about bringing down an entire skyscraper to take out one infamous crime lord. It will take the arbitrary morality systems of similar games, hold them by the collar, and laugh straight in their face.

This will be a game about wanton destruction – destructible environments are almost guaranteed, and with co-op and dedicated servers already promised by Microsoft, we know this is going to be a sandbox worth levelling. Remember the fun you had flattening all the buildings in *Red Faction*, taking full advantage of its Geo-Mod engine? Imagine that, but with your friends carving their own devastating path through the city beside you.

Pair that with the Superhero Simulator-type gameplay we've seen from previous entries in the series (which scratches the action-RPG itch we've had since *Watch Dogs* brushed our skin), and an art style that fits somewhere between *Ni No Kuni* and *Borderlands*, and you've got a game that will fall into a gaping niche on the Xbox One. This is an important exclusive for Microsoft to have under its belt, and we eagerly await the inevitable trickle of news that will be passed down from the Agency Tower as we edge closer to the game's unannounced release.



This guy looks familiar – we all think he's incredibly reminiscent of the hulking power-cop that was used in the earliest *Crackdown* promo material. This may be a reboot, but the developer is keeping the heart of *Crackdown* alive.

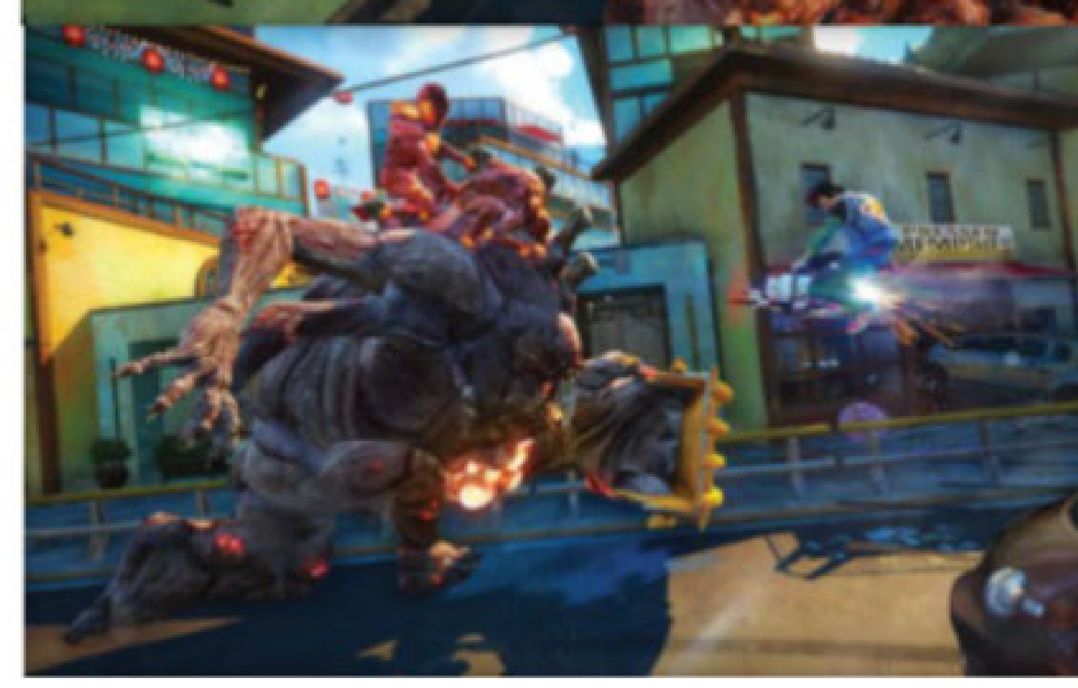


We're pleased to see the neon lighting and sort-of cel-shaded art style make a return. We're fed up of the earthy palettes of other city-based games!

Below: The enemy classes are reminiscent of *Left 4 Dead*, which is a shame, because everything else about the game seems to be quite innovative. It's a shame to see all-too-familiar zombie tropes.







SUNSET OVERDRIVE

ORANGE IS THE NEW CRACK

Publisher: Microsoft Studios **Developer:** Insomniac Games **ETA:** 28 October

THERE'S A CONCEPTION that gamers are obsessed with energy drinks. It's not a misconception – typically, gamers *love* energy drinks – but Insomniac Games has taken a rather more satirical approach to the association we as a culture have with highly sugared beverages.

Insomniac intends to enact as much chaos as possible with the single-player campaign in game, but the most recent gameplay we've seen of the game points to a watertight multiplayer experience, too. There's a co-operative mode named Chaos Squad that allows synchronous eight-player action, which can be enacted with your friends or through a matchmaking system so you can wreak havoc on the apocalypse with total strangers instead. Chaos Squad stands separate from the main campaign, and is accessed via signposted phone booths scattered around the city.

Above: Sunset City looks like the ultimate playground; it's as if *Jet Set Radio* blasted colour all over *Dead Rising*.

Below: The art direction of *Sunset Overdrive* is very vibrant. All this orange and soda-based imagery is making us thirsty, though…

Once you're in, you and your pals will get to vote between two missions and then proceed to fight your way through the chosen scenario. *Sunset Overdrive* breaks away from the pack in its kind-of mission endgame – once you've cleared the selected objective, Night Defense will launch. Think of Night Defense as a kind of Horde mode from *Gears Of War*, or Firefight from *Halo*. It's a wave-based grind that has elements of tower defence to it, as strange as that may sound. You're tasked with defending tankers of OverCharge – the delicious energy drink that's brought about the apocalypse – lest more of the zombie hoard access the soma that gives them their power.

The better you do in the mission preceding Night Defense, the harder your fight will be in the final round – this is measured with the Chaos Meter, so you can keep tabs on how hard you're making things for yourself in the lead-up. The defence itself will revolve around your standard *Sunset Overdrive* gameplay – a variety of weapons, traversal skills and abilities will be at your disposal, but (like *Gears*' Horde mode) you can also set traps in the preamble to each set of waves.

Paired with the madness and colourful environs of Sunset City itself, the multiplayer mode looks to give a little more meat to the sandbox bones of Insomniac's newest effort. Making the most of the Xbox One's powerful online infrastructure, *Sunset Overdrive* could be the vital co-operative exclusive Microsoft needs to draw back more of the crowd that the PS4 poached from the socially-centered 360 back at the start of this generation.





THE CREW

A CONTENDER FOR THE ACTION RACING THRONE

Publisher: Ubisoft **Developer:** Ivory Tower **ETA:** 11 November

■ DO YOU DREAM of driving from one coast of America to the other? Do you often fantasise about embarking on that all-American road trip that's been romanticised by so many films, books, TV shows? Well, even if your budget or schedule doesn't allow it, now you can – *The Crew* takes America and squeezes it at both ends, condensing the continent into one sizable map that can be driven across in 90 minutes. The roads and vistas are loyal to the diversity that made American road trips famous – the graphics are incredible when you consider the size of the map you're playing in, and the cars and their models themselves react seamlessly to the impressive lighting engine that illuminates Ivory Tower's toy town interpretation of the United States. From interstates to the bayou to desert tracks and even *Smuggler's Run*-inspired beach chases, *The Crew* has it all – held together by an RPG core. While the story looks pretty uninspiring – how deep can you go when it's all about racing cars at the end of the day? – the RPG mechanics at least promise to colour the gameplay with something a little deeper than simply 'win this race to get a new car'. We look forward to seeing what *The Crew* can do for the driving genre when it launches this winter.

■ *The Crew* will allow you to play online with up to eight players at a time, engaging either co-operatively or competitively in campaign-based missions (much like *NFS: Rival*'s All-Drive feature)

THE ORDER: 1886

SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES

Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment **Developer:** Ready At Dawn **ETA:** 2015

■ IN A WORLD where 'half-breeds' – a demonically deformed sect of humanity – has been allowed to run rampant, the rate of human innovation has bolstered. By the Victorian times, we managed to create 'communicators' – which are basically steampunk mobile phones. The war against 'half-breeds' has also warranted the need for The Order – a regime of soldiers not dissimilar to the Knights Templar that make use of the mysterious Blackwater to prolong their lives indefinitely, and heal wounds at will. It's like Wolverine's healing factor, bottled.

The Order: 1886 plays like the third-person cover shooter popularised last generation – note the 'cover-based' bit because, like *Gears Of War* for example, if you go all gung-ho with this, you *will* get killed. You play as Sir Galahad, who comes equipped with an interesting selection of explosive steampunk weaponry. The thermite rifle, for example, unleashes a cloud of aluminum iron oxide on its primary fire, with a flare that ignites it on the secondary trigger; an effective weapon for crowd control. We've only seen ten minutes of gameplay so far, but it didn't disappoint.



■ *The Order: 1886* is pushing the textures and the physics beyond last-gen capabilities, having each material react individually and realistically to ballistic stimuli.





Below: While Link often faces groups of enemies on his regular quests, the battle scenes in *Hyrule Warriors* contain many more enemies. They prove rather less adept as fighters though, offering little resistance – as is traditional in *Dynasty Warriors*.

Above: As well as regular combinations of physical attacks, screen-clearing specials are available in the form of magical attacks.

HYRULE WARRIORS

FORCE RULES THE DAY

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Koei Tecmo
ETA: 19 September

IT'S TELLING THAT Nintendo has chosen to omit the word 'Zelda' from the title of *Hyrule Warriors*. It's a name that comes loaded with a distinguished history, not to mention a certain expectation of how the game will play – dungeon-based puzzle sections interspersed with combat are the order of the day. *Dynasty Warriors* is also a name that comes loaded with expectation – the expectation of a less cerebral experience, thanks to the simplicity of its massive battle scenes. The combination of the two is bold but not inconceivable – Link is often confronted with multiple enemies during his own skirmishes, after all – but it was a project that the developers admitted had caused nerves prior to its reveal.

Hyrule Warriors is best thought of as *Dynasty Warriors* with a *Zelda* skin, much in the same way as the *Gundam* licence did little to change the fundamentals of Koei Tecmo's long-running series. As such, it's largely business as usual – pick a character and traverse a large battlefield, fighting hundreds of enemies along the way. The inclusion of the likes of Midna and Zelda as playable characters alongside Link is what we'd expected, and each boasts their own unique attack combos and magical special attacks. However, it's the appearance of staple *Zelda* items such as bombs in the game's treasure chests that provide the feeling that Tecmo Koei has properly considered the source material.

Indeed, the traditions of the *Zelda* series haven't been entirely dispensed with. King Dodongo may no longer be confined to a small boss arena, but you can still lock onto him with the L button and he's as susceptible as ever to having bombs thrown into his mouth. But it's worth reiterating the balance of influences here – while downed foes release rupees and you'll find yourself assisting Goron forces rather than ancient Chinese warlords, the heart of the experience is very much *Dynasty Warriors* rather than *Zelda*.

The break from tradition does allow the game to explore some interesting new avenues, that we hope are explored more in the future. While co-operative play is a staple of *Dynasty Warriors*, it is rarely seen in *Zelda* (the excellent *Four Swords* games excepted), and the prospect of teaming up with a friend is genuinely exciting. Co-op is local only, but the Wii U GamePad is brought into play to provide each player with a full display.

The combat-oriented design is decidedly uncomplicated, but at this stage appears to provide a good basis for a new take on the *Zelda* series. If you love *Zelda* solely for the dungeons and puzzles then this is a sore disappointment, but for everyone else it will be a refreshing change.

Below Bosses roam the open battlefields, leaving the player to contend not only with them but with hordes of smaller enemies also.





INDIE ROUNDUP

THE MOST INTERESTING INDEPENDENT GAMES ON THE HORIZON

INSIDE

Format: **Xbox One**
Developer: **PlayDead**
ETA: **2015**



THE NEW game from the *Limbo* developer, *Inside* looks like a spiritual sequel to the shadow theatre horror-show that took many gamers by surprise way back in 2010. *Inside* trades *Limbo*'s flora and insectoid fauna for a more industrial setting – a nightmarish, dystopian and oppressive *1984*-esque world of buzzsaws and zombie-afflicted drones. It's PlayDead's chance to prove it's more than a one-trick pony.

CUPHEAD

Format: **Xbox One**
Developer: **StudioMDHR**
ETA: **2015**



CUPHEAD LOOKS like an incredibly interesting game. Aside from the art direction, which has been shamelessly inspired by old-school Disney animation (not a bad thing in the slightest), the developer intends to break the Guinness World Record for most bosses in a Run & Gun game. Currently sitting at 25, StudioMDHR wants to have at least 30+ bosses throughout *Cuphead*. Will it be the new *Super Meat Boy*? We hope so.

WHITE NIGHT

Format: **Xbox One**
Developer: **Osome Studio**
ETA: 2015



ANY GAME based on the cinematic movement of German Expressionism is guaranteed to get our attention. So Osome Studio's *White Knight* – a survival horror throwback that unapologetically takes its cues from the original *Alone In The Dark* – piqued our interest from the off. Set in 1930 America, the game is somewhere between Mark Z. Danielewski's *House Of Leaves* and a waking dream from David Lynch. Be afraid. Be very afraid.

ORI AND THE BLIND FOREST

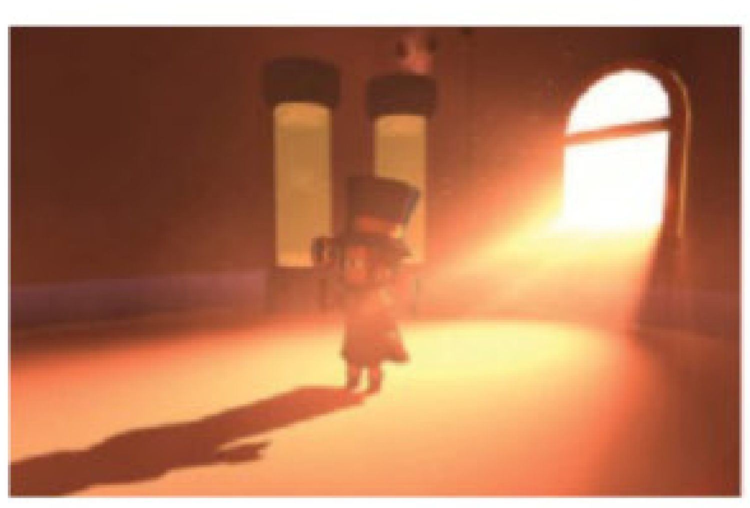
Format: **Xbox One**
Developer: **Moon Studios**
ETA: **2015**



REMEMBER UBISOFT'S *Child Of Light*? It was undoubtedly a great RPG, if weighed down a little by its insistence on battles and sluggish role-playing elements. *Ori And The Blind Forest* looks like a game aimed at anyone who wanted a much more immediate action experience, coated in the same artistic setup of *Child Of Light* – albeit with a more emotional and intimate twist to cater for the tender side of us all.

A HAT IN TIME

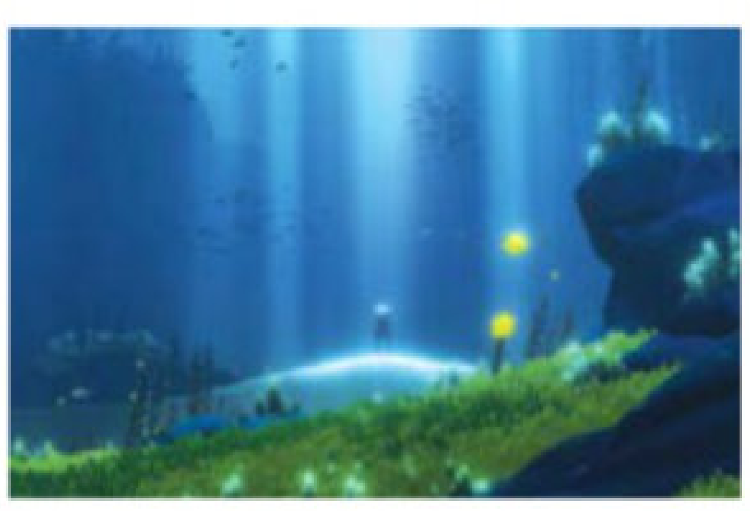
Format: **PC**
Developer: **Gears For Breakfast**
ETA: **TBA**



EVOKING MEMORIES of Nintendo 64 platformers, *A Hat In Time* was originally due for release in February this year but with extra chapters, co-op and New Game+ added to the development roadmap, there hasn't been a new release date set for the project. Even so, the dusky Science Express chapter in the screenshot above shows work continues to go well on the project.

ABZÛ

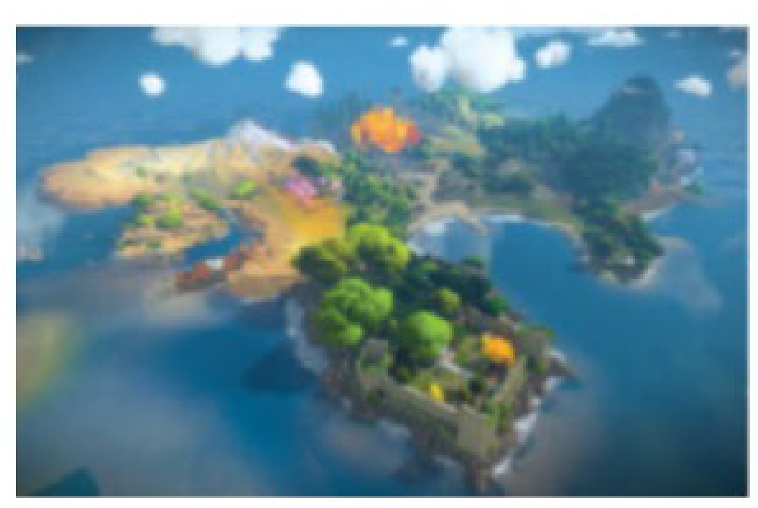
Format: **PS4**
Developer: **Giant Squid**
ETA: **2015**



ABZÛ APPARENTLY draws inspiration from the 'universal innate memory' that we all share – the hardwired consciousness that sits within our psyche, reminding us all of our origin beneath the sea. The word abzû comes from Mesopotamian mythology, meaning an 'ocean of wisdom'. Incidentally, this is also the setting of the game that you're tasked with exploring.

THE WITNESS

Format: **PS4, iOS, PC**
Developer: **Thekla, Inc.**
ETA: **2014**



THE WITNESS is a first-person puzzle game, set on a mysterious island, formed from a collection of seemingly impassable obstacles, labyrinthine corridors and laterally designed logic. With no HUD, no hints and no direction, every iota of progression is down to the player. It seems like a reflection of creator Jonathan Blow's psyche – all puzzles brimming with weight and weirdness.

TITAN SOULS

Format: **PS4, Vita**
Developer: **Clawmark**
ETA: **2015**



IMAGINE A mix of *Dark Souls* and *Shadow Of The Colossus*, all reimagined in an old 2D *Zelda*-style template. Now imagine that game was originally conceived in a 48-hour game jam. That's the basic story of *Titan Souls*, a pixel-art game that harkens back to the very beginning of the masochistic dream game. Though it's seeing a release on the PS4, this is certainly a better fit for the Vita.

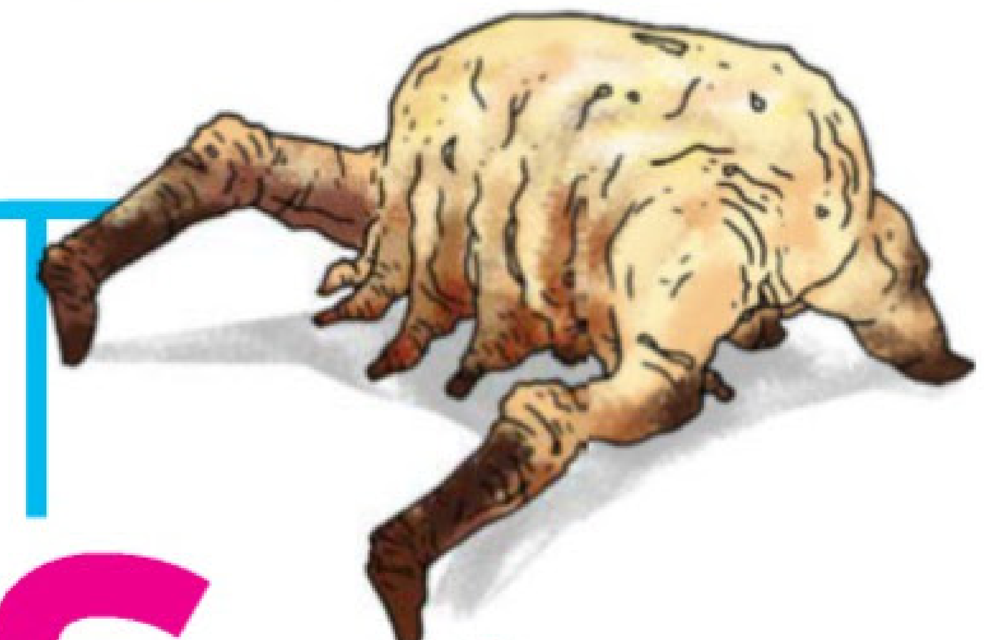



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and tell us what you've found in this image that simply doesn't belong
How big were the dinosaurs? Find out in issue one
big
How were the dinosaurs?
Dinosaurs were the largest animals ever to walk the Earth. Some of them were taller than trees, longer than aeroplanes and heavier than a herd of elephants.
Sauroposeidon
Argentinosaurus
Did you know?
Brachiosaurus
Diplodocus
Tyrannosaurus rex
Spinosaurus



150 GREATEST **MOMENTS** IN GAMING







THE HIGHS AND LOWS THAT DEFINED THE GAMES INDUSTRY

ILLUSTRATIONS **KEVIN SCULLY**







150 THE FIRST GAME EVER

THE MOMENT: In 1958 Manhattan Project scientist Dr. William Higinbotham created *Tennis For Two* on a Donner computer.
WHY? Because it was the birth of videogames as we know it.

149 THE SOUND OF MUSIC

THE MOMENT: The Vectrex debuted the idea of console start-up music, ushering gamers into a new world of entertainment.
WHY? Boot-up sounds would become a defining feature of console hardware.

148 HOT COFFEE

THE MOMENT: Hacked *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* code reveals abandoned sex mini-game. Controversy ensues.
WHY? *GTA* has always sat within the crosshairs of mainstream media but Hot Coffee caused global outrage, leading to an overhaul of rating systems.

147 LEEROY JENKINS

THE MOMENT: When a *World Of Warcraft* player with a penchant for poultry dismantled an intricate battle strategy that cost the lives of the rest of their team.
WHY? The video became an internet phenomenon that spread far and wide beyond the boundaries of gaming into mainstream media.

146 TOMODACHI LIFE CONTROVERSY

THE MOMENT: When Nintendo received criticism for not including same-sex relationships in its life-sim *Tomodachi Life*.
WHY? It highlighted how behind Nintendo was in terms of social game design.

145 QTES ARE BORN

THE MOMENT: When a cinematic sequence turns interactive, prompting the player to initiate an action to progress.
WHY? *Shenmue* director Yu Suzuki coined the term, but the concept can be traced back to arcade laserdisc game *Dragon's Lair*. In recent years it has become a staple of contemporary game design.

144 MIKE SINGLETON'S LEGACY

THE MOMENT: *The Lords of Midnight* and *Doomdark's Revenge* creator Mike Singleton passes away 10 October 2012.
WHY? Hugely influential through his seminal Eighties text adventure, Singleton's indelible impact on videogame storytelling remains his unfading legacy.

143 LEGO BUILDS AN EMPIRE

THE MOMENT: TT Games releases *Lego Star Wars: The Video Game* in 2005. The world falls in love with cute yellow blocks all other again.
WHY? Utilising smart licensing, nostalgia and affable humour, the streets were soon paved with gold (well, yellowy-gold bricks) as Lego became a videogame powerhouse.



142 MORTAL KOMBAT'S KILLING BLOWS

THE MOMENT: With the iconic booming voice ordering 'Finish Him', a decisive killing blow is dealt to your opponent with brutal results. One of the first instances of such over-the-top movie violence in videogames.
WHY? *Mortal Kombat* was developed by John Tobias and Ed Boon as a response to the ever-popular *Street Fighter II*, albeit with a focus on blood, weapons and more general brutality. What Boon and Tobias could never predict, though, was the staying power their 'Fatalities' would accrue, and the cultural impact they would make – the impact of which can still be seen today (think *Gears Of War*'s executions).

141 RISE OF THE INTERNET

THE MOMENT: When internet forums started to populate with weird, often illogical videogame memes.
WHY? A huge part of gaming culture that has grown in recent years, memes represent the weird, passionate fandom that simply doesn't exist anywhere else.

140 GAMES™ RUINS STAR WARS

THE MOMENT: Issue 10 of **games™** reviewed BioWare's *KOTOR*, complete with a spoilerific image.
WHY? Only one other moment in **games™**'s historic tenure has caused its readership to turn to the Dark Side quite like the offending image (see moment 133). Again, we're very sorry.



139 SILENT HILL LAUGHS AT ITSELF

THE MOMENT: After completing a series of tasks in *Silent Hill 2*, the puppet master is revealed to be a Shiba Inu dog.
WHY? One of the lighter moments in the otherwise oppressively dark *Silent Hill* series. Don't underestimate the power of self-effacing humour.

138 JACK THOMPSON'S CRUSADE

THE MOMENT: American activist Jack Thompson takes umbrage to mature content – violence and sex in particular – in videogames and files several lawsuits against high-profile publishers.
WHY? Thompson is one of many to levy unsubstantiated claims that videogames lead to real-life acts of violence. His continued failure and disbarment highlights how ridiculous and ill-informed some outspoken members of the media still remain.

137 KEN KUTARAGI'S GREATEST HITS

THE MOMENT: Former Sony Computer Entertainment CEO Ken Kutaragi dispenses sage wisdom to the industry large.
WHY? "[PS3 is] for consumers to think to themselves 'I will work more hours to buy one'. We want people to feel that they want it, irrespective of anything else."

136 WARNER BUYS ATARI

THE MOMENT: Nolan Bushnell sells Atari to Warner Communications for a considerable sum, estimated at $28-32 million.
WHY? It was a moment that legitimised the medium to the wider world. All of a sudden videogames were serious business. And more importantly, could make a *lot* of money.

135 KONAMI'S WORST E3

THE MOMENT: Konami's 2010 E3 press conference stunned the gathered press…and not for the right reasons.
WHY? Failed stunts, barmy presenters and baffling statements, one media outlet labelled it as an "uncomfortable monstrosity." Lesson learnt.



133

134 TRIALS AND ERRORS

THE MOMENT: Edging victorious over the finish line on *Trials Evolution* with just a hair between you and your opponent.

WHY? One of the most essential multiplayer experiences of the last decade, few games have inspired such fierce competition.



133 WHERE'S HALF-LIFE 2?

THE MOMENT: games™ decides not to review *Half-Life 2*, given we received the code after the game hit retail.

WHY? No other moment in the history of **games™** has been criticised quite so aggressively. After being accused of laziness, pettiness and downright stupidity, we eventually decided to review it in a bookazine.

GAMES™'S COVER STAR BREAKDOWN

Over the 150 magazines we've made, there's been many a man, woman, car, creature or, erm, Sackboy adorning the cover. Here's how it breaks down:

76 MALE

17 FEMALE

45 TECH/CAR/ICON/ENSEMBLE

12 ANIMAL/CREATURE

132 HACKERS GET MORE OUT OF KINECT

THE MOMENT: When an industrious community of hackers took Kinect far beyond the boundaries of gaming.

WHY? Utilising Microsoft's motion controller for creative exploration – including robot vision and 3-D doodling – demonstrated the nascent capabilities of the divisive hardware.

131 CLOVER BURNS BRIGHTLY

THE MOMENT: *Viewtiful Joe*, *Okami* and *God Hand*. These excellent games from a very short-lived game studio were created by some of Japan's most brilliant designers.

WHY? Few developers have achieved so much in such a short period of time. The studio's closure remains a blow to game design.

130 PETER MOLYNEUX CHOOSES A GOD

THE MOMENT: Industry hyperbole machine Peter Molyneux reveals what's inside the cube: a chance to be a god.

WHY? How many games actually end with a life-changing event? The winner, Bryan Henderson, will take on the mantle of 'god' in *Godus* come release.

129 THE GAMECUBE'S SECRET

THE MOMENT: Discovering that the GameCube had two alternative boot sequence sounds.

WHY? While Sony and Xbox's consoles were all about pomposity, Nintendo remained willingly playful despite its heavy competition.

128 PUBLISHER SENSITIVITY

THE MOMENT: The debut trailer for *Resident Evil 5* reveals a white protagonist gunning down black characters in an African village.

WHY? Allegations of racism and insensitive imagery had a surprisingly positive outcome, sparking a debate about how videogames represent people.

127 MASS EFFECT 3'S ENDING

THE MOMENT: When BioWare's epic sci-fi trilogy came to a close and the wails of disgruntled fans could be heard from space.

WHY? BioWare buckled to the complaints and offered an extended ending. A win for the fans; a loss for creative integrity.



126 ET DESERTED

THE MOMENT: The notorious urban legend of Atari burying thousands of *ET* cartridges turns out to be true (sort of).

WHY? It got the world talking, both when the original rumour began to spread and recently when the copies were unearthed.

125 THE RETURN OF THE 2D PLATFORMER

THE MOMENT: *Limbo*, *Super Meat Boy*, *Rayman Origins*, *Spelunky!* Just a few of the games that reclaimed the 2D platformer for a new generation.

WHY? Developers excavated the past for ideas and presented some of the most progressive games of the generation.

124 OUTDATED HOSTS

THE MOMENT: Actor Jamie Kennedy bumbles around the stage at E3 embarrassing both himself and the games industry in general.

WHY? Kennedy antiquated remarks proved that gamers would no longer tolerate stereotypes. Time to move on.

123 THE 'TWIN PEAKS' OF GAMES

THE MOMENT: Some think *Deadly Premonition* is a work of art others think it's a work of crap. It's one of the most divisive games ever made.

WHY? *Deadly Premonition*'s cult following is as bizarre as the game itself.

122 WIIMOTE DRAMA

THE MOMENT: When the Wiimote slipped out of the player's hand and caused destruction to your furniture.

WHY? A backlash against Nintendo Wii at no fault of the company's negligence. Never underestimate consumers.

121 SAREN'S CHOICE

THE MOMENT: When your actions in *Mass Effect* cause [spoilers!] Saren to kill himself.

WHY? It was the first sign that Bioware's promise of a franchise impacted by *your* choices could be possible.

120 THE RISE OF IN-GAME ADS

THE MOMENT: Almost instantly after the inception of gaming, corporations discover a lucrative marketing opportunity.
WHY? A direct feed to today's youth, in-game ads sell everything from fast food to presidential candidates to gamers

119 URBAN REALISM

THE MOMENT: Walking through a virtual proxy of an existing city and feeling the culture bleeding through the pavement cracks.
WHY? *Grand Theft Auto*, Activision's *Tony Hawk* series and *Sleeping Dogs* all used iconography, music and fashion to make videogame worlds feel authentic.

118 VIRTUAL MISHAP

THE MOMENT: Nintendo releases the Virtual Boy, the first "portable" games console capable of displaying "true 3D graphics".
WHY? It was Nintendo's first commercial failure after a string of hugely profitable and inventive technological advancements. Lessons were learnt.

117 #1REASONWHY

THE MOMENT: A discussion around why there are fewer women working in videogames explodes on Twitter.
WHY? It was direct insight into the lack of equality in the industry, as thousands took to social media to tell their stories.

116 ATARI STOPS MAKING CONSOLES

THE MOMENT: The pioneer in home videogame consoles, Atari exits the hardware race in 1996.
WHY? As one of the leading innovators in console hardware, the commercial failure of the Atari Jaguar marked the end of an era.



115 THE MYSTERY OF HALF-LIFE 3

THE MOMENT: Valve continues to make fans wait for a sequel over a decade in the making.
WHY? The drawn-out anticipation towards *Half-Life 3* has almost entered industry joke status, but in terms of pure excitement Valve's sequel overshadows everything.

LONGEST RUNNING COMPANIES (THAT ARE STILL AROUND TODAY)

NINTENDO
ESTABLISHED
1889

LEGO GROUP
ESTABLISHED
1932

SEGA
ESTABLISHED
1951

KONAMI
ESTABLISHED
1969

ATARI
ESTABLISHED
1972

ACTIVISON
ESTABLISHED
1979

114 THE RISE OF THE BEDROOM CODERS

THE MOMENT: The early years of videogame software are dominated by the imagination of individuals designing games from their bedroom.
WHY? It established a movement in the games industry. Creativity was king and anyone with an idea had the potential to be a game developer.

113 NINTENDO LOSES A PIONEER

THE MOMENT: Former Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi passed away in 2013 after running the company for over 50 years.
WHY? Under Yamauchi's leadership Nintendo entered the electronics market and became the global leader in the videogame industry.

112 THE INDIE AGE

THE MOMENT: When triple-A videogames funded by publishers and designed by hundreds of people took a backseat to the ingenuity and imagination of smaller teams.
WHY? The indie movement over the last decade has provided both a fresh creative outlet and profitable alternative to the existing industry business model.

111 THE LAUNCH OF XBOX LIVE

THE MOMENT: Microsoft launched its online service in 2002, introducing one of the fundamental features of Xbox.
WHY? Sega was the first to debut online connectivity out of the box but Xbox came along when broadband was more widely adopted and popularised the concept.

110 BIOSHOCK LIVES UP TO ITS NAME

THE MOMENT: As the curtain is drawn back on *BioShock*'s villain, one of the most subversive narrative rug-pulls is carried out.
WHY? Storytelling in videogames is often criticised, but Ken Levine's script provided a hugely thought-provoking twist.

109 VIDEOGAME MOVIES SUCK

THE MOMENT: When the *Super Mario Bros.* movie adaptation is released and the world weeps.
WHY? Not even the late, great Bob Hoskins can save this atrocity. And so starts the calamitous history of videogame movie adaptations.

108 THE DOWNFALL OF ARCADES

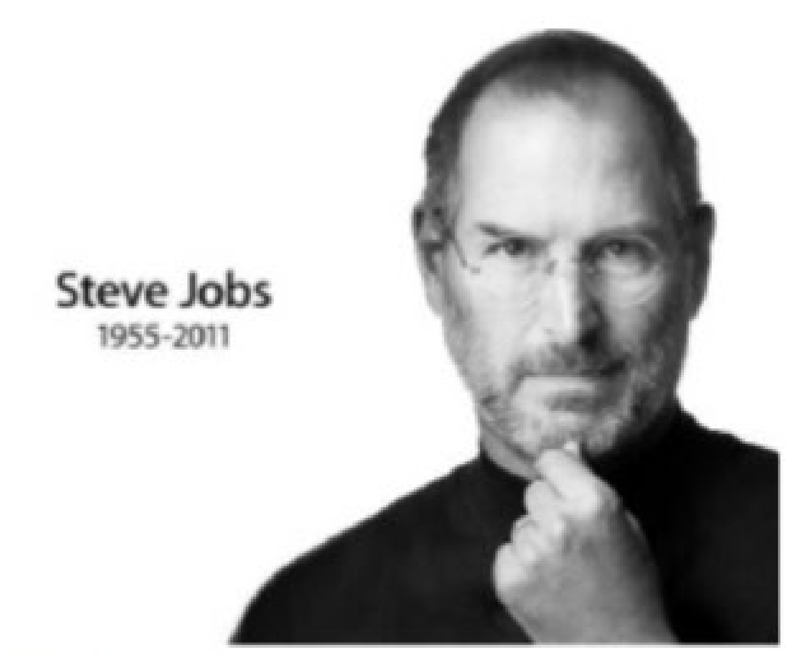
THE MOMENT: As home consoles and online interactivity become the predominant videogame hardware, the popularity of arcades dwindle.
WHY? For many gamers, arcades were formative to their love affair with the medium, and their continued closure, not to mention waning status, signals that their time has passed.

107 FINDING YOSHI

THE MOMENT: Collecting all 120 stars in *Super Mario 64* and finding an old friend on top of the castle.
WHY? Finding Yoshi felt like a genuine reward for persevering through every puzzle and collecting all the stars in the game.

106 THE PASSING OF A LEGEND

THE MOMENT: Not a great moment, rather an acknowledgment of a great man. When Apple co-founder Steve Jobs passed away in 2011, he left an indelible mark on the games industry.
WHY? Jobs was a strong advocate of gaming; his technology innovations paved the way for modern game consumption.



104 NSA SPIES ON WORLD OF WARCRAFT

THE MOMENT: When leaked documents revealed that American and British intelligence agencies had infiltrated



105

THE MOBA TAKES OVER

THE MOMENT: When a small free-to-play title caught the attention of the wider gaming population and went on to be one of the most popular and profitable games of all time
WHY? *League Of Legends* proved that the MOBA was not just the 'next big thing', but a valid and rewarding genre in itself. Riot Games, in a demonstration of admirable market awareness, took what *DotA* was doing and improved upon the formula. *League of Legends* has inspired a massive following around the world, and proved to wider media that eSports isn't just a forgettable facet of the industry.

various online games with the objective of hunting down terrorists.
WHY? It's the sort of political paranoia nonsense that seemed like it was straight out of *The Thick Of It*... except in this case it absurdly turned out to be very real.

103 N-GAGE PREDICTS MOBILE GAMING

THE MOMENT: The precursor to the iGeneration, Nokia's ill-fated N-Gage bridged mobile phone and handheld videogame technology, paving the way for casual gaming today.
WHY? Despite a lukewarm sales reception, Nokia's visionary device successfully anticipated the future of mobile gaming.

101



102 BLACK MESA WELCOMES YOU

THE MOMENT: Standing on a train, touring the Black Mesa facility and entering the world of *Half-Life*.
WHY? It immersed players into the game world using limited interactions and simplistic visual storytelling. One of the finest opening sequences of all time.

101 STUDIO LIVERPOOL WIPEOUT

THE MOMENT: When Sony shut one of its most celebrated first-party studios relatively recently in 2012.
WHY? One of Britain's most talented developers defining PlayStation brand, Studio Liverpool will be sorely missed.

100 GAMES™'S FIRST 10

THE MOMENT: It took two issues, but *Metroid Prime* has the distinct honour of being awarded **games™**'s first perfect 10.
WHY? "The elusive ten is reserved for game of incredible, irrefutable quality." With only a handful of tens handed out to date, it remains a high watermark. »



95 THE DEAD RISE

THE MOMENT: The dead rise from the grave. From the straight-up zombie shooter to the poignant human stories set in the zombie apocalypse, zombies take over the world of gaming.

WHY? Zombies have always been an integral part of gaming – they allow for a brainless, generic enemy that doesn't carry the too-close-to-home empathy that human enemies do and have AI that's much easier to code. The recent surge of popularity of zombies started with the likes of *Call Of Duty: World At War*'s 'zombie mode' and *DayZ* but other titles to take advantage of the unique opportunities the brainless undead allow for in game design are the likes of *Red Dead Redemption*, *Dead Space*, *Dead Island* and *Left 4 Dead*.



99 THE RETURN OF THE POINT-AND-CLICK

THE MOMENT: When the point-and-click genre became cool again, thanks to a new wave of involving narrative-led games.

WHY? As videogames evolved to incorporate more intricate forms of storytelling, the point-and-click (or adventure game) re-emerged triumphant.

98 360 RINGS DISASTER

THE MOMENT: Xbox 360 owners around the world discovered three little red lights that spelled doom for their console.

WHY? It led many to question the quality of Microsoft's platform, not to mention the cost of companies competing to release their hardware first.

97 THE BATTLE OF BATTLEFRONT 3

THE MOMENT: When *Battlefront 3* was in development, then out of development, then in development, then out of…

WHY? Easily one of the most anticipated games stuck in development limbo, *Star Wars: Battlefront 3* has had a tumultuous development that would rival *Duke Nukem Forever*.

96 MODISH MOD

THE MOMENT: The PC community reclaimed game design for the bedroom coder and reinvented existed games.

WHY? This tinkering movement fundamentally changed the way developers approached PC game design, opening the architecture for its consumers to use its groundwork as a springboard for new ideas.

94 JAPAN GAMING GOES PLATINUM

THE MOMENT: After the closure of Clover Studios, staff migrated to form Platinum Games and the madness continues still…

WHY? *Bayonetta*, *Vanquish* and *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance*, Platinum's ability to amaze is only surpassed by its uncanny capacity to surprise.

93 PC OVERTAKES THE C64

THE MOMENT: The IBM-compatible PC overtakes the Commodore 64's market share for the first time in 1985.

WHY? The rival computer standards of the Eighties began to give way to the PC, gaming's longest-serving platform.



92 SATURN LAUNCH

THE MOMENT: Sega announced at E3 1995 that the Saturn will launch *that day*.

WHY? Sega shot itself in the foot. The surprise announcement upset retailers, plus the PlayStation beat its price.



91 COMPLETING YOUR POKÉDEX

THE MOMENT: Capturing all of the original 150 (151 if you're lucky, 152 if you count the glitch Missingno) Pokémon.

WHY? *Pokémon Red/Blue* was the first taste of interactive social gaming and swapping Pokémon with other players was a seminal gaming moment.

90 MARIO MULTIPLIES

THE MOMENT: Nintendo reveals the power of GameCube with two technically impressive demos of *Super Mario 128* and *The Legend Of Zelda*.

WHY? It was the promise of both titles that would eventually lead to disappointment when neither came to fruition.

89 THE RETURN OF THE FIGHTING GENRE

THE MOMENT: After years of waiting, Capcom revealed the long-awaited return of *Street Fighter*.

WHY? *Street Fighter IV* triggered the ensuing comeback of the fighting genre, which had been dormant for years.

88 CAPCOM'S CYNICAL DLC STRATEGY

THE MOMENT: When gamers discovered additional content hidden in *Street Fighter x Tekken*, to be unlocked with a DLC 'key' released at a later date.

77



WHY? It took a business model to an extreme and the backlash forced all publishers into re-thinking DLC plans.

87 THE FANTASY EXCLUSIVE

THE MOMENT: One of Sony's most prestigious exclusive franchises, *Final Fantasy*, quietly goes multi-format with *Final Fantasy XI* on PC.

WHY? It not only signalled the end of a lucrative partnership but also the gradual disintegration of third-party exclusivity.

86 PLAYSTATION IS HOME ALONE

THE MOMENT: Sony promises a progressive and revolutionary social platform for PlayStation 3.

WHY? The risk didn't pay off. Home didn't become the all-encompassing social hangout Sony anticipated and with hefty load times and general buffoonery, serious gamers ignored its existence.

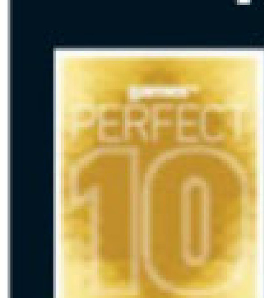
85 YOUTUBE CLAMPS DOWN

THE MOMENT: YouTube's content ID removes thousands of hours of gaming content for copyright reasons.

WHY? It was a slap in the face of the gaming community, stripping away the creative expression that feeds the core of gaming culture.

GAMES™'S PERFECT SCORES:

- METROID PRIME
- BURNOUT 3
- GEARS OF WAR
- GOD OF WAR II
- BIOSHOCK
- GRAND THEFT AUTO IV
- FALLOUT 3
- DEMON'S SOULS
- MASS EFFECT 2
- SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2
- LITTLEBIGPLANET 2
- DEAD SPACE 2
- BIOSHOCK INFINITE
- GRAND THEFT AUTO V



What makes a game a 10? Read games™ Perfect 10 to find out: tinyurl.com/qfcwchx

84 THE END OF LUCASARTS

THE MOMENT: After toiling away working on licensed *Star Wars* titles, the once great LucasArts is shut down.

WHY? LucasArts defined the adventure game genre and while its halcyon days had long passed, that did little to soothe the pain of its closure.

83 DOUBLE-A TURNS TO INDIE

THE MOMENT: When the number of middle-tier developers diminished and indie development filled the space.

WHY? With smaller studios and publishers facing bankruptcy, smaller development teams establish stability as the industry faced its most turbulent time.



82 GAMES AS REAL WORLDS

THE MOMENT: When you take down your first dragon in *Skyrim* and the sheer scale and depth of Bethesda's RPG is revealed.

WHY? It instantly became the RPG for all others to be compared to. Vast in scale and head-spinning in attention to detail, it's hard to imagine any game topping that immersive sense of majesty any time soon.

81 SONY'S FAILURE TO LAUNCH

THE MOMENT: Sony releases the PS3 in Europe after several delays, courting criticism and driving consumers to Xbox 360.

WHY? A major misstep in Sony's strategy for PS3, it would take years for the company to reclaim dominance in several international regions.

80 DEATH OF SHAREWARE

THE MOMENT: After less than a decade, the golden age of shareware – developers giving away their software for free – comes to an end.

WHY? While shareware became a thing of the past, a more refined business model would emerge, while it also became the basis for many contemporary videogame business practices.

79 THE META-GAME GNOME

THE MOMENT: Carrying a gnome through the entirety of *Half-Life 2*'s campaign to unlock a special achievement.

WHY? While a bizarre, arbitrary task, the gnome achievement represented the birth of the achievement meta-game. Thanks, we guess?

78 ROCKSTEADY SAVES BATMAN

THE MOMENT: Nobody expected much from *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, but a small studio from London changed the face of licenced videogames.

WHY? After years of interminable bargain-bin fodder, the licensed videogame is legitimised, and the successful videogame/movie franchise continues today.

77 GAMERS GET WAGGLING

THE MOMENT: When Sony and Microsoft viewed Nintendo's success in motion controls and wanted a piece of the pie.

WHY? Neither Kinect and PlayStation Move successfully capitalise on Wii's success, showing that it's not just about great tech but great ideas.

76 DEVELOPERS EARN ACHIEVEMENTS

THE MOMENT: When the British Academy of Film and Television began to award outstanding achievements in game design.

WHY? It was the long awaited acknowledgment and validation of the medium as a genuine creative platform.

75 THE GREAT INVENTOR

THE MOMENT: One of the leading creative voices of Nintendo's early years sadly passes away in 1997.

WHY? The creator of the Game Boy, Game & Watch and the modern-day D-pad, Gunpei Yokoi's work shaped the modern gaming world.

74 DLC BECOMES BIG BUSINESS

THE MOMENT: While downloadable content had existed in some form for years, it was the Dreamcast that pioneered the idea on home consoles.

WHY? Today, DLC is a valuable commodity to both the consumer and publishers, used as a powerful marketing weapon. Love or hate the idea, it's changed the industry at its core. »

73 SONY UPGRADES USERS

THE MOMENT: Sony unveiled its answer to Xbox Live: low on cost, high on free stuff.

WHY? The PlayStation 3 eventually got one over its rival Xbox 360 with free online play, but when it did launch a subscription service – offering free and discounted games –Sony set the precedent for consumer value.

72 THE END OF THQ

THE MOMENT: When one of the world's biggest publishers announced bankruptcy and sold its assets.

WHY? In the post-recession industry, THQ's tragic closure proved that no one was safe.

71 GIANT ENEMY CRABS

THE MOMENT: *Genji: Days Of The Blade* is shown at E3 2006, the game based on the actual history of Japan. Then a giant crab shows up.

WHY? The meme-bait was widely ridiculed and contributed to Sony's most embarrassing E3. Still referenced even now, it was proof that games culture was at a point where words had to be chosen much more carefully, because a lot more people were watching.

BEST SELLING CONSOLES OF ALL TIME



1 PLAYSTATION 2 155 MILLION

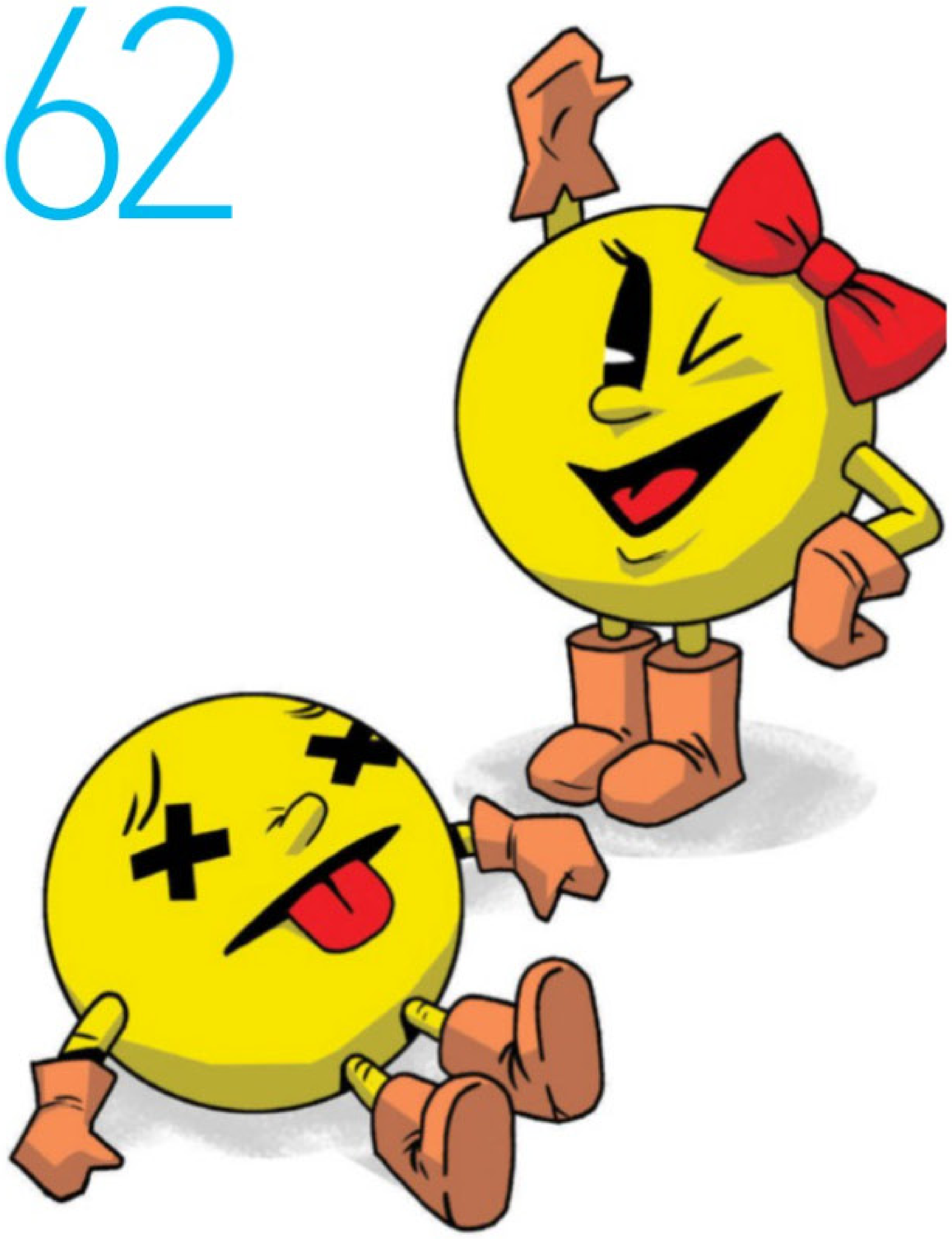
2 NINTENDO DS 154 MILLION

3 GAME BOY 119 MILLION

4 PLAYSTATION 102 MILLION

5 WII 101 MILLION

62



70 THE DAIGO PARRY

THE MOMENT: Like the Super Bowl of fighting games, Daigo Umehara and Justin Wong fight to the last pixel in *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* during EVO 2004.

WHY? The resulting parry (where Umehara counter-attacks from a sliver of health) typifies the electric atmosphere of tournament gaming.

69 RETURN OF THE KING

THE MOMENT: After years wallowing in development limbo, *Duke Nukem Forever* is finally released. Be careful what you wish for…

WHY? It was a sobering lesson for all involved in the dangers of hype.

68 THE BIRTH OF THE MOBA

THE MOMENT: When a simple *Warcraft III* mod became an industry game-changer.

WHY? *DotA* invented the modern MOBA as we know and with it hundreds of hours were lost to the ether.

67 MULTIPLAYER ASSAULT

THE MOMENT: *Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* is released with a fresh angle on competitive online shooting.

WHY? Lifting inspiration from the RPG genre, Modern Warfare brought progression into the online arena.

66 DOUBLE FINE'S ADVENTURE

THE MOMENT: When Tim Schafer took to Kickstarter to raise money for his point-and-click adventure game.

WHY? It didn't just kickstart his game, but it also kickstarted a valid alternative to the traditional publisher system.

65 FIRST WOMEN IN GAMES CONFERENCE

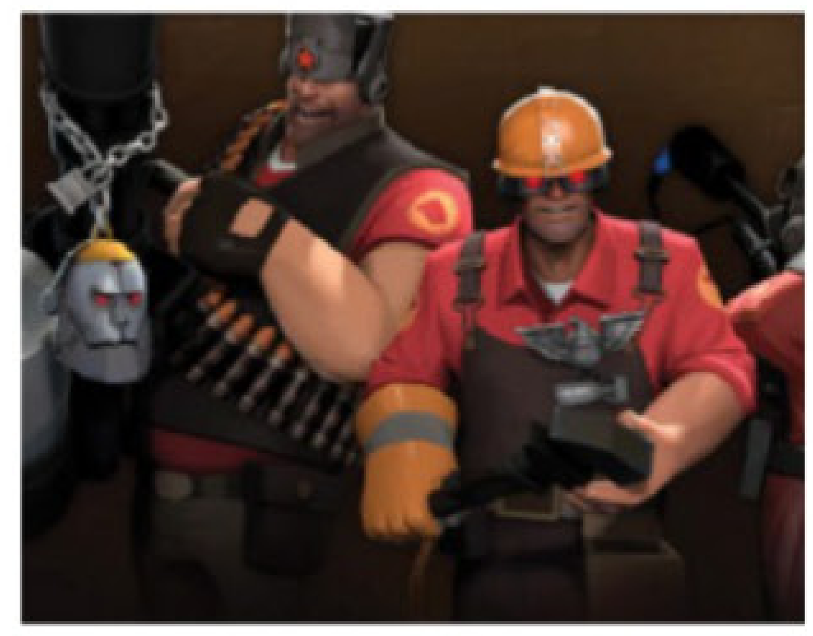
THE MOMENT: Created to promote and support the progression of women within the games industry, the first Women In Games conference promotes gender equality in the industry.

WHY? After criticism that the industry treats women unfairly, the conference offered and still offers additional opportunities and encouragement to an often overlooked sector of videogames.

64 BITTEN BY THE F2P BUG

THE MOMENT: Micro-transactions and pay walls replace the traditional retail-pricing model.

WHY? While divisive and often exploited, free-to-play was a major turning point both in corporate and creative practice.



63 A YEAR-OLD EASTER EGG

THE MOMENT: After a year on release, it's revealed that a Naboo Starfighter is hidden within *Rogue Squadron* on N64.

WHY? It's rare for an unlockable feature to surprise gamers; it was even rarer for one to remain hidden for so long.

62 MS PAC-MAN

Ms. Pac-Man becomes the first female protagonist in gaming history in 1982.

WHY? The original *Pac-Man* was designed to appeal to women but *Ms. Pac-Man* was the first to attempt to address equality in a visual way.

61 EVIL INVADES DARK SOULS

THE MOMENT: You're battling through the world when an ominous warning appears: 'You Are Being Invaded'

WHY? One of the most inventive uses of online. Nothing quite strikes fear into the hearts of players like a roaming phantom out to steal your souls.

60 VIRTUAL REALITY RESURGENCE

THE MOMENT: After many failed attempts in the past, a new era of virtual reality promises to bring players closer to games than ever before.

WHY? With Sony and Facebook developing rival products, it's clear that virtual reality is going to play a big part in the way we play games in the future.

59 THE FIRST THIRD-PARTY PUBLISHER

THE MOMENT: In 1979, Activision entered the software game and started producing cartridges for the Atari 2600. It invented the third-party publisher.

WHY? Activision paved the road for third-party publishing at large, proving you didn't need to manufacture hardware to develop great games.



47 HAIL TO THE CHIEF

THE MOMENT: *Halo* is released on Microsoft's Xbox console and the world pays attention. The first-person shooter wasn't just for PC gamers any more – *Halo* made sure of that.
WHY? *Halo*'s release marked more than just a coming of age for developer Bungie – it was a game that proved the first-person shooter could not only work on consoles, but – in some ways – also outshine their PC predecessors. *Halo*'s open-ended level design showed other designers that an FPS didn't just have to operate in a corridor, and the repercussions of the game's innovative vehicular combat are still felt in releases to this day.

58 INFINITY WARD WALKOUT

THE MOMENT: When several key staff at Infinity Ward left Activision over pay and creative disputes.
WHY? It highlighted unfair practices within the industry, while also rocking consumer faith in the publisher. The ensuing legal battles continued for some time after the event.

57 INDIE GAME: THE MOVIE

THE MOMENT: A documentary filmmaker explores the lives of several notable independent game developers, including Phil Fish, Jonathan Blow, and Team Meat.
WHY? It offered a rare insight into the minds behind some of the most inventive games of recent years.



56 SEQUELS GO DARKER

THE MOMENT: Everything goes a bit Chris Nolan when several old franchises got revived with an edge.
WHY? We've seen *Tomb Raider* get dirty, *Batman* bloody and *Castlevania* horrific. Gritty sells.

55 SEGA STOPS MAKING CONSOLES

THE MOMENT: After the commercial failure of the Dreamcast, Sega retires from the console arms race.
WHY? Sega defined the childhoods of many with its consoles. Depending on how you look at it, the world is either little more or a little less blue without them.

54 COMPLETING PORTAL

THE MOMENT: Hearing GlaDOS' melodic parting words, composed by Jonathan Coulton.
WHY? A witty and unforgettable denouement from the malevolent AI. Valve shows how its done.

53 THE BIRTH OF EASTER EGGS

THE MOMENT: *Adventure* developer Warren Robinett created a secret room in his 1979 Atari game crediting him with its creation.
WHY? When the secret was discovered after release, Atari decided to leave it, starting the trend of hidden 'easter eggs'.

52 VIRTUAL LIFE STALLS

THE MOMENT: EA launches *SimCity*. Fans are outraged about always-online connection as servers collapse under the weight of traffic and a torrent of bugs emerge.
WHY? Listen to your audience. EA learnt a valuable lesson by going against the wishes of its community.

51 THE ARRIVAL OF CERTIFICATION

THE MOMENT: Concern rises about the amount of violence in games like *Doom* and *Mortal Kombat*. In 1994, the ESRB is born.
WHY? The established ratings board proved the increasing popularity of gaming, and the need for classification.

50 PSYCHO MANTIS READS YOUR MIND

THE MOMENT: *Metal Gear Solid*'s Psycho Mantis baffled players with his mind-reading abilities.
WHY? A moment of horrifying inventiveness, this boss battle freaked players out by reading through save data, drawing on a number of measurable habits. Pure meta brilliance.



49 THE FIRST ISSUE OF GAMES™

THE MOMENT: 2002, the first issue of **games™** is published with *Splinter Cell* adorning the cover.
WHY? Because without it you wouldn't be reading these words right now.

48 PS2'S DVD DRIVE

THE MOMENT: Sony releases its latest console boasting a DVD drive that gives it a technological edge over its competitors.
WHY? The DVD drive changed everything for developers. It opened up possibilities for storage and enhanced graphics and characterisation. No looking back.

46 THE GOLD NINTENDO QUALITY SEAL

THE MOMENT: When Nintendo was resilient in the face of the market crash and ensured that its software met a high standard, marking it with a gold seal.
WHY? First used by Nintendo of America, it was later used by Nintendo of Europe and was a promise of quality after certain negatively received games such as *Custer's Revenge*. This push for quality control lead to some of the most ground-breaking games of all time.

45 PC BECOMES BETTER THAN CONSOLE

THE MOMENT: When 3D graphics cards became affordable in the mid-Nineties, and PC gaming opened up.
WHY? With more personal computers capable of advanced graphics, the PC became the technological leader in the games industry. »

44 MUD CLEANS UP

THE MOMENT: Multiplayer text adventures that incorporated multiple genre elements become quite important…
WHY? Games like *World Of Warcraft* and *EverQuest* wouldn't be possible without the transformative impact MUDs had on a generation of developers.

43 CAN IT RUN CRYSIS?

THE MOMENT: Crytek releases *Crysis* and everyone questioned the quality of their PC hardware.
WHY? With the enhanced graphical capabilities, this was the start of the PC's comeback.

42 THE NO RUSSIAN MISSION

THE MOMENT: An early scene in *Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* put you in the shoes of a terrorist tasked with brutally gunning down civilians in an airport.
WHY? It was tabloid-baiting controversy; the type that propelled *GTA* to the top of the charts in the early Nineties. Publishers once again started to exploit gratuitous content to publicise their products.

41 BECOMING A FAKE ROCK GOD

THE MOMENT: The release of a game that enabled players to pick up plastic instruments and attempt to play along to popular music.
WHY? The oversaturation of *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* was a lesson in mistreating brands and undervaluing consumers. Still, it was fun while it lasted.

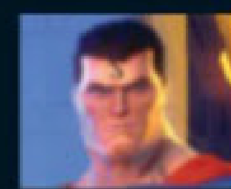
40 VISUAL UPGRADES

THE MOMENT: Publishers re-release their old products with a shiny HD spiff-job.
WHY? It gave birth to a cynical business model that grows ever more dubious as Rockstar, Sony and Square Enix released enhanced versions of games less than a year after their release.

39 GAMING ENTERS MAINSTREAM TV

THE MOMENT: When *South Park* creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone showed they understand videogames.
WHY? The entertainment industry outside of videogames has proven time and time again it doesn't understand the medium. With knowledge and love, *South Park* episodes like *Make Love Not Warcraft* satirised our passion brilliantly.

LONGEST RUNNING FRANCHISES



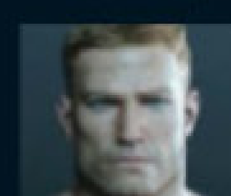
SUPERMAN
First release: Superman (1979) **Most recent:** Infinite Crisis (2014) : 35 years



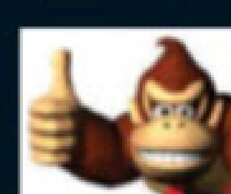
PAC-MAN
First release: Pac-Man (1980) **Most recent:** Super Smash Bros (2014) : 33 years



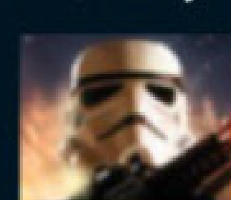
MARIO
First release: Donkey Kong (1981) **Most recent:** Super Smash Bros (2014) : 33 years



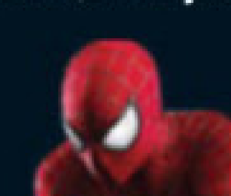
WOLFENSTEIN
First release: Castle Wolfenstein (1981) **Most recent:** Wolfenstein: The New Order (2014) : 33 years



DONKEY KONG
First release: Donkey Kong (1981) **Most recent:** Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze (2014) : 32 years



STAR WARS
First release: Star Wars (1983) **Most recent:** Star Wars: Battlefront (2015) : 32 years



SPIDER-MAN
First release: Spider-Man (1982) **Most recent:** The Amazing Spider-Man 2 (2014) : 31 years



SPACE INVADERS
First release: Space Invaders (1978) **Most recent:** Space Invaders Infinity Gene (2009) : 31 years

26



38 THE PSN HACKING SCANDAL

THE MOMENT: Hacker group Anonymous break through Sony's firewall and take down the PlayStation Network.
WHY? It was a huge blow for Sony and it took years to rebuild consumer trust.

37 NEW REWARDS

THE MOMENT: Xbox introduced Achievements, creating a new type of challenge for players, and an addictive way to push players to finish games.
WHY? It changed the way videogames are played and designed. With an Achievement or Trophy, developers could lead gamers to explore every inch of the game world.

36 THE CASUAL GAMER

THE MOMENT: Nintendo's new console broadens the appeal of gamers and invites everyone and their gran to play along.
WHY? Casual gaming became very big business, an untapped market much more fruitful than previous thought. It turns out that gaming is something for everyone.

35 GAMING BECOMES A SPORT

THE MOMENT: When professional gaming evolved to new heights, with millions around the world watching competitions.
WHY? While its still in its infancy, eSports is poised to launch competitive gaming into the stratosphere.

34 TECHNOLOGY MAKES MORE EMOTIVE GAMES

THE MOMENT: As mo-cap and more advanced animation technology becomes standard, acting enters the forefront of videogame storytelling.
WHY? As the medium demands quality performances from its triple-A games, giving actors like Nolan North and Troy Baker celebrity status is justified.

33 3D IN YOUR HANDS

THE MOMENT: As 3D gaming fails on home consoles, Nintendo brings it to the handheld with spectacular results, proving it wasn't just a gimmick.
WHY? One of the few innovations that felt worthwhile in recent years, the Nintendo 3DS took gamers into a new dimension.

32 THE VIDEOGAME CRASH OF 1983

THE MOMENT: After a raft of poor software due to a lack of quality control, the US games industry suffered an inevitable collapse in 1984.
WHY? Quality over quantity became the new mantra. It would take Nintendo's guiding hand to get the industry back on track.



31 AN EVOLUTION OF GAMING FORM

THE MOMENT: A text-based game called *Zork* changed the face of game design forever.
WHY? *Zork*'s undulating world of mystery and intrigue enraptured players without the need for graphics. This was all about the storytelling.

30 FIRST USE OF MOTION CAPTURE

THE MOMENT: *Rise Of The Robots* wasn't the most memorable game but it was the first to implement motion capture into a videogame.
WHY? Motion capture would be essential for realism, while rudimentary here, it was the beginning of a new age of animation.

29 THE FIRST VIDEOGAME CONSOLE

THE MOMENT: Ralph Baer releases the world's first home videogame console, the Magnavox Odyssey.
WHY? Not only was it a breakthrough moment, but Baer's design was hugely farsighted, shaping many of the games we play today – from genres like sports to online experiences.

28 ULTIMATE CONTROL

THE MOMENT: The PlayStation controller enhances player control with the inclusion of two thumb-controlled analogue sticks.
WHY? It set the industry standard for ergonomic precision and player control. Sony hasn't dared to radically alter the design since.

26 HOW TO SELL A GAMES CONSOLE

THE MOMENT: Released in 1989 with *Tetris*, the Game Boy goes on to become one of the best-selling videogame consoles of all time.
WHY? The perfect mix of hardware and software that made a truly game-changing package.

25 RISE AND FALL OF NINTENDO

THE MOMENT: Nintendo continues to attract criticism over its dwindling hardware sales with the lacklustre release of the Wii U, and its subsequent media confusion.
WHY? The company's unwavering persistence and constant reinvention means that it's never too late for Nintendo to turn its fortunes.



24 GAMES BECOME BIGGER THAN FILMS

THE MOMENT: With the likes of *Grand Theft Auto* and *Call Of Duty*, videogames become a more profitable industry than movies and music.
WHY? Videogames became not just a hobby for hermits living in their parent's basement; this is an industry dominating the globe.

23 TOYS AND GAMES UNITE TO SELL MILLIONS

THE MOMENT: The launch of *Skylanders* bridges the gap between toys and interactive entertainment.
WHY? A multi-million dollar concept that exploited a gap in the market, appealing to an entirely new type of gamer.



27 NINTENDO'S LOSS IS SONY'S GAIN

THE MOMENT: After several years of development, Nintendo and Sony fail to come to a deal over a CD add-on, and the rest is history…
WHY? If the deal between the two companies had gone through, it's unlikely that Sony would have entered the console marketplace when it did – the very fact that it ended up releasing the PlayStation redirected the gaming industry and made it a far more mainstream affair, specifically in the West. The move to CD also allowed Sony to poach the blockbuster *Final Fantasy VII* from Nintendo – a game whose graphics solidly established Sony as the best console-makers at the time. If Nintendo had managed to hold onto *Final Fantasy*, we'd have a very different industry history.



22 LET'S PLAY

THE MOMENT: YouTube, Twitch, Machinima. Video content is the definitive force of a new generation of videogame consumers.
WHY? Videogame critique evolves into YouTube stars and Twitch streams. For better or worse? You decide.

21 THE GAME MAKER

THE MOMENT: Epic launches its Unreal Engine, making an accessible toolkit for developers across the world.
WHY? It almost became the industry-standard game engine. The Unreal Engine is responsible for bringing some of the most memorable gaming experiences to life.

20 GAMING IS REDEFINED BY APPLE

THE MOMENT: When Apple released the iPhone Software Development Kit (SDK) in 2008, mobile gaming changed.
WHY? Mobile games existed before, but the release of the SDK matched with Apple's intuitive touchscreen and digital distribution platform was a flashpoint in the medium.

19 COMPLETING A MARIO LEVEL

THE MOMENT: Stepping inside the Mushroom Kingdom, stomping on Goombas and jumping for the flagpole.
WHY? This was where adventure gaming began for many. As influential as it was exhilarating, it's game design at its purest.



18 BAT AND BALL

THE MOMENT: *Pong*: the ball goes left, the ball goes right, the ball goes left… oh, you get the idea.
WHY? It generated the type of mass-media buzz that sent consumers into a frenzy. Videogames had arrived.

17 SEGA'S SWANSONG

THE MOMENT: The last console Sega manufactured, the Dreamcast, was as innovative as it was overlooked.
WHY? Its major contribution can't be overstated: it brought online gaming into the living room with its built-in modem.

16 MULTIPLAYER GAMING ENTERS THE HOME

THE MOMENT: Out of the arcade and into the living room, *Street Fighter II* is the most influential beat-'em-up of all time.
WHY? It helped to re-popularise multiplayer gaming both at home and in the arcade, making it a driving force in the industry.

15 THE FIRST LICENSED GAME

THE MOMENT: *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* was the first game to take its content officially from an outside source.
WHY? There's been some huge money exchanged for movie licensed – like Atari securing *ET* for $23 million. It remains big business to this day.



14 THE LAUNCH OF WORLD OF WARCRAFT

THE MOMENT: *World Of Warcraft* brought to life a world unlike anything else that came before it. It was huge, deep, and connected millions.
WHY? It's one of the most important games of all time. A spare time-consuming fantasyland that galvanised the MMO genre, it achieved the Guinness World Record for being 'the most popular MMORPG' based on subscribers. It expanded beyond just gaming, catching the attention of Trey Parker and Matt Stone of *South Park*, catching the attention of sociologists who were keen to see how online life emulated real life, and market analysts who closely observe how gold farming and money changes hands in the virtual world.



13 STEAM ARRIVES

THE MOMENT: Just prior to the launch of *Half-Life 2* Valve releases a new digital distribution platform, Steam.
WHY? A huge innovative platform that didn't just offer downloadable games but a raft of accessible features aimed at both developers and the community.

12 MINECRAFT CHANGES THE WORLD

THE MOMENT: A retro-inspired game that enabled players to break wood and build houses. What's all the fuss about?
WHY? The survival-horror/education/creative experience has so many applications that it has transcended 'gaming' altogether. One of the most versatile games that exists, if you can get past the look of it, it's a joy to explore.



11 THE BIRTH OF THE FPS

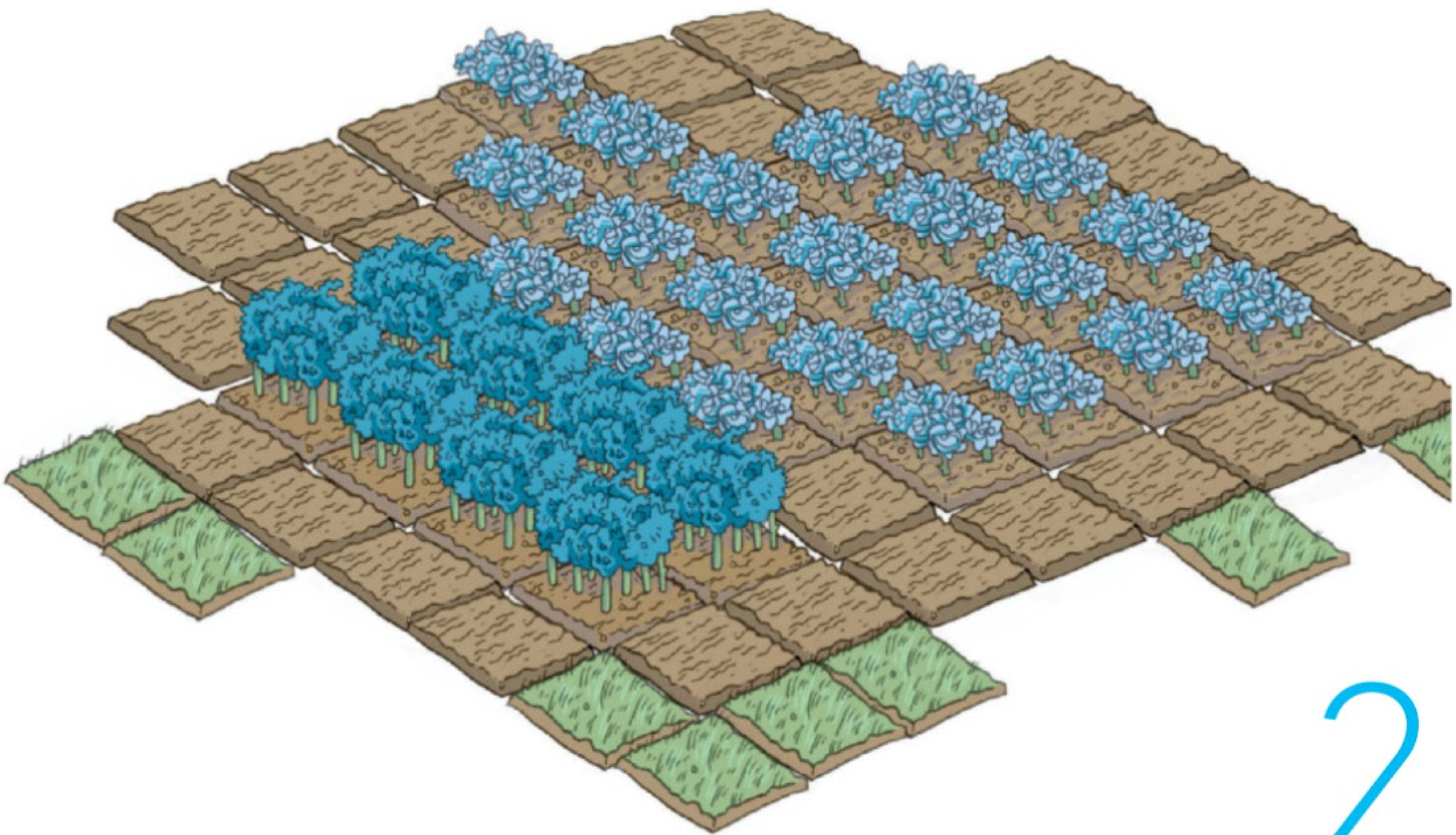
THE MOMENT: With BFG in hand and a horde of demons running towards you thirsty for blood, the first-person shooter was born. *Doom* came bursting onto the gaming scene, unapologetically and brilliantly violent.
WHY? Aside from more-or-less inventing the first-person shooter, *Doom* also pioneered online distribution, online communities and modding.

10 GTA REFINES OPEN-WORLD GAMING

THE MOMENT: Stepping onto the streets of Liberty City for the first time was an awe-inspiring experience. The first 3D *Grand Theft Auto* not only blew the door wide open for open-world gaming, but it also found a place for mature storytelling.
WHY? *Grand Theft Auto* has become an industry juggernaut and there are few games that can claim to have had such a pervasive influence over the medium in the last decade. What DMA Design (and later Rockstar) achieved was nothing short of extraordinary.

9 THE MODERN GAMES CONSOLE

THE MOMENT: When your home videogame console wasn't just capable of playing videogames but could play a whole host of media. From DVDs to Blu-ray and now to television streaming apps and exclusive video content, videogame consoles no longer exist; they're only a part of the multimedia entertainment hubs we find ourselves with.
WHY? Both Microsoft and Sony have spent the past few years emphasising how important multimedia is for the future of gaming. Integrating TV functionality, securing exclusive deals with the likes of ESPN and Netflix. It's the beginning of a path that leads to the 'No Console' generation – videogames simply being streamed through your television.



2

8 THE 3D PLATFORMER

THE MOMENT: Bounding from the 2D platformer into the vibrant world of 3D, *Super Mario 64* reimagined both Mario and the whole platformer genre he popularised. With seemingly infinite potential of computer graphics, designers were suddenly only limited by their imagination.

WHY? In a time before *Super Mario 64*, 3D graphics were basic and mostly restricted to a two-dimensional plane. *Super Mario 64* rewrote the book of game design, founding the third-person action game and introducing analogue control. Nearly twenty years on, this excellent game has rarely been bettered.

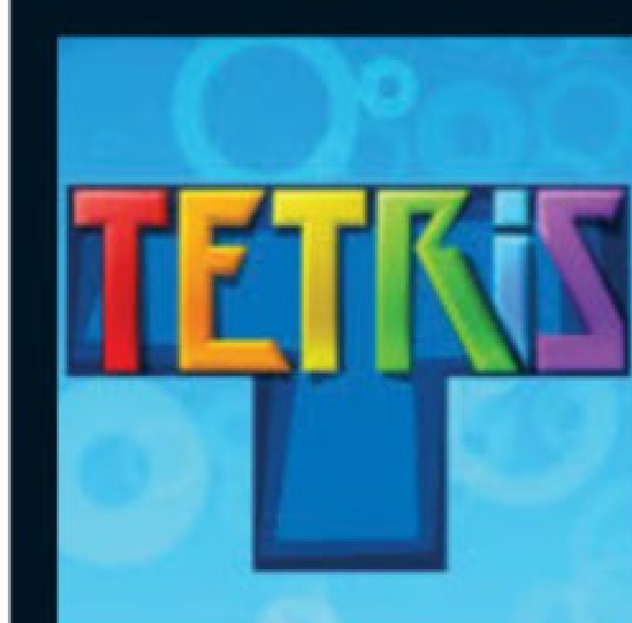


7 GAMERS GET CONNECTED

THE MOMENT: Whether it's downloading content, playing others online or just exchanging barbs on a forum, the role that interconnectivity has had in the formation of videogames has been second to none.

WHY? While the internet, and our subsequent involvement with other gamers hasn't always had a direct impact on gaming, it's hard to think of a single facet of videogame culture that doesn't involve the internet in some fashion.

HIGHEST SELLING GAMES OF ALL TIME



TETRIS
143 MILLION

WII SPORTS
81.99 MILLION

MINECRAFT
49.5 MILLION

SUPER MARIO BROS.
35.53 MILLION

GTAV
32.5 MILLION

6 THE BEGINNING OF THE MMO

THE MOMENT: When *Ultima Online* was launched and created the first widely popular massively-multiplayer online game. Players quest and interact with each other in an involving, richly detailed world where they can fully inhabit a new identity in a virtual landscape.

WHY? The popularity of *Ultima Online* and the level of immersion that the MMO offered caught the attention of other developers. The influence could be felt far and wide, paving the way for *EverQuest* and the ubiquitous *World Of Warcraft*.

5 HANDHELD CONSOLES

THE MOMENT: Various LED, VFD and LCD handheld games appeared over the years, but it was Nintendo's continued ingenuity that resulted in the Game Boy that made the handheld console such a fundamental part of the industry.

WHY? Why is the handheld console place substantially higher than the home console on the list? Well, it's had the more overriding influence on gaming through the years than any other hardware. Looking at today's mobile, touchscreen and downloadable games, the handheld market has had the biggest impact on the industry at large.

4 E3 ESTABLISHES THE GAMES INDUSTRY

THE MOMENT: The Electronic Entertainment Expo is established in 1995, a trade fair hosting the world's media that promotes the latest industry innovations and software. At first a gaudy cockfight that evolved into the most important industry event on the calendar.

WHY? It established the games industry as we know it. It wasn't just a trade show; it was a statement of intent. Once E3 was established, gaming had its own voice and a publicity machine that dwarfed all other entertainment sectors. Gaming was now a force of nature.

3 TOUCH CONTROLS REDEFINE GAMING

THE MOMENT: Devices boasting touchscreen functionality offer a unique way for players to interact with games. Designers suddenly had a completely new way to interpret the medium, which had its own unique creative advantages and limitations.

WHY? While the use of touchscreen on devices such as the Nintendo DS was fairly basic, it wasn't until tablet and mobile devices became more advanced that it had a wider impact on gaming. A whole new generation of gamers are being raised by touchscreen devices and the transformative impact this will have has merely been hinted at to date.



2 SOCIAL GAMING BECOMES THE FUTURE

THE MOMENT: *FarmVille* and *Candy Crush Saga* become both hugely popular and massive money-spinners overnight, proving that social media is a legitimate gaming platform.

WHY? Social media has always been a powerful ally of videogames but the assimilation of gaming and social media platforms has opened up the marketplace to a wealth of potential. While browser-based games have yet to capture the imagination of hardcore gamers, it won't be long before the concepts used in Facebook games ebb into traditional platform titles. »



SPACE INVADERS

THE MOMENT: By the time *Space Invaders* reached arcades in the late Seventies, space fever had gripped America. *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind* had both proved to be huge successes at the US movie box office and there was an appetite for more space-set adventures.

At the time most other coin-ops were grounded in reality – either sports or racing simulators, with maybe the odd Western shootout. *Space Invaders* offered players a world completely unlike their own. Waves of extra-terrestrial enemies fall down the screen, its thematic structure presenting a underlining narrative that was uncommon at the time.

It was an original, inventing genres, introducing tropes that we've all grown familiar with over time – player lives, enemies returning fire – and popularised the concept of achieving a high score (while also recording score data to the internal memory). The open-ended nature of the gameplay and the allure of leaving your own mark on the scoreboard attracted queues of curious patrons eager to see what all the fuss was about. It epitomised the sense of community that defined the arcade years.

WHY? *Space Invaders* was the game that brought the industry in the big leagues. Everyone started to pay attention after *Space Invaders*; people wanted to play it, businesses wanted to invest. It catapulted the entire medium into the spotlight.

The game would justify the top spot on this list for the sheer number of advancements it made in the industry both in the arcade and home consoles. However, the wider cultural impact that the game had is a far better testament to the work of creator Tomohiro Nishikado. With a suite of easily recognisable sprites and simple but engaging visual design, *Space Invaders* became the first global gaming brand. Hundreds of articles were generated in both print and television media, while merchandise opportunities swelled, emphasising its impact on popular culture. In 1980 Atari hosted The Space Invaders Tournament, the first electronic sports event of its kind.

Without *Space Invaders* it might have been years before videogames grew to such a level of prominence, or for developers to understand the broader appeal that the medium had. The impact that *Space Invaders* had on videogames has been compared to that of The Beatles in the pop music industry. That might be a grand statement but one thing is for certain: without *Space Invaders* the industry would be a very different place today and a little worse for it.

A YEAR AT THE TOP





Sony Computer Entertainment Europe's Jim Ryan has a great – if exhausting – year ahead with SCEE

After a shaky start last-gen with the PS3, Sony has rallied – the waning years of the last-gen consoles saw the company dominate with blockbuster first-party exclusives, customer-satisfying services and a fervent attention to the demands of the gaming masses. The PS4 launch was only the start of the newest chapter in Sony's dominance, and in the year since the console's announcement, the company's position as gaming's top dog has only intensified. Sony Computer Entertainment Europe and its affiliated executives conduct themselves with a quiet confidence – they have respect for their product and their end-user, something that comes across in every show, trailer, briefing and demo. It all appears so casual, yet Sony takes care to maintain its public image; the faces and names we associate with the company may radiate with a focused enthusiasm, but behind the scenes a lot of energy is devoted to making sure Sony never comes across as complacent (a criticism that has been levelled at its Microsoft rivals often over the past year).

"You can sometimes find that industry stakeholders get a bit full of themselves and take events too seriously," said Ryan when we interviewed him at last month's E3 in Los Angeles – an event that marked the year anniversary of the PS4's first big showcase. "My overriding impression of [our] show was that it came across as very confident without being arrogant, and there were some really nice touches of humour, which is often missing from these events." He's right – of all the stage presentations put on by Sony, Microsoft, EA and Ubisoft, it was Sony who shined: social media was abuzz with praise for the company, almost unanimously so, where the other publishers and console-makers found their shows to be a little more divisive. Sony's humour was on-point, its teases revealing without being too vague, its presentations exploring the specifics that hardcore gamers wanted to know.

"I thought the humour was very welcome and the confidence came across just right, but – most importantly – there was a lot of good stuff on the content side. Microsoft had that, too, but I think where we were a little different was that we focused not only on content, but also on innovation. Whether it's Project Morpheus, or PlayStation TV, we like to think we're an innovative company, and we're going to be using these projects to take the gaming experience further in the future. A year after the PS4, we didn't want to just be sitting on our laurels."

And it's clear that Ryan and Sony haven't been taking their success for granted – across all branches of the PlayStation brand, Sony has been doubling down on the promise that it made at E3 last year; to be the platform all about gamers, and the games they want to play. Since the inception of that mission statement, the PS4 has proved Sony sticks by its guns. "The evidence so far in terms of overwhelming demand for our platform would suggest that, yes: we are delivering on the intention we outlined last year. [Since launch], demand has far outstripped supply, and the fact that that's just starting to regulate is telling."

It's a problem that could have unstuck Sony's reign of this leg of the console war – back with the PS3, consoles were so scare in the first few months of its release that it dented the PlayStation brand so severely it took Sony years to recover gamers' collective respect. Lessons have been learnt, though, and despite Ryan's own admittance that "[stock issues] in

> **"PLAYSTATION NOW, IF DONE CORRECTLY, REALLY HAS THE POTENTIAL TO EXPLODE THE TARGET AUDIENCE"**
> **SCEE PRESIDENT, JIM RYAN**

Europe were pretty grim" because of Sony's focus on the more "competitive situation" in the UK and North America, there haven't been too many widespread issues with retailers running out of consoles. Sony pushed to take the initial lead – it knew half the battle was in getting the install base established early – and the company even resorted to selling the PS4 systems at a price point that cost it $60 per unit. The console has only recently started making the company a profit, seven months after its launch.

"I think it takes quite a lot of the pressure off – although there's always pressure, believe me," explains Ryan – a former accountant who's au fait with the financial implications of the PS4 finally turning a profit. "I lived through all of these cycles and with PS3; well, it's a matter of public record that we lost $2.5b in the first year of PS3, so the loss on last year for PS4 was tiny in comparison – $70m in the first year, which we've never done before. The guys in Tokyo did a fabulous job engineering the thing, and the way in which we've sold more than we anticipated it's the nature of the industry »

"YOU KNOW, UK CONSUMERS ARE NOT SHY OF COMPLAINING WHEN THEY FEEL THEY'VE BEEN EXPLOITED AND WE REALLY HAVEN'T HAD THAT" SCEE PRESIDENT, JIM RYAN

Coming Up Next...

PlayStation is keen to expand its reign from the king of home consoles to the king of living room entertainment, it seems. Here's a quick rundown of its pincer attack

PlayStation Now

The oddly named PlayStation Now is a Gaikai-based streaming service that purports to provide PlayStation content to the PS4, Vita, PS3, Sony Bravia TVs and Sony mobile handsets. You'll reportedly need a 5mps internet connection to maintain a useable service, and in return for your solid internet you'll be rewarded with PlayStation, PS2 and PS3 games on any Sony device.

PlayStation TV

The Vita TV is a combination of console and set-top box (already available in Asia) that's making its way to Europe for £84.99. It's Sony's answer to the Apple TV – a device that will let you stream multimedia, as well as letting you Remote Play from the PS4 or play Vita games straight from the card.



that you get into that virtuous cycle, volumes go up and you get economies of scale and all that so yeah, the cost structure is in good shape – and as such we're in a much better position."

The revenue stream borne of the PS4's profitability means good things for Sony's extra-curricular gaming projects – Project Morpheus and the recently announced PlayStation TV have room to manouevre as far as budget is concerned, and knowing that PS4s will keep selling means Sony knows it'll have an ever-expanding, loyal customer base to work with. "We have stringent financial targets and we'll be expected to meet those but it's obviously easier to innovate from a position of strength than if you're haemorrhaging cash," explains Ryan, referring to the proposition of Morpheus and PSTV growing as a result of the PS4's success. "We do have tough objectives but there is innovation – a drive to take things forward. If you do that, you get into another of these virtuous cycles – and that is where we want to stay."

One of the 'virtuous cycles' Ryan keeps referring to is the ground-breaking PlayStation Plus service – if you're a frequent reader of **games™**, you'll know that we've got high praise for Sony's subscription-based venture. With the launch of the PS4, PS+ became a mandatory requirement for players that want to make use of the PSN's online services (to the irritation of those who were used to the free service offered back on the PS3). But in undercutting Microsoft's Xbox Live, and offering a service that – as of last month – grants two free games per console (Vita, PS3 and PS4) per month, Sony has set the precedent for what gamers expect from a subscription model.

"We've thought very hard – and we've worked very hard – to make sure PS+ is a great consumer proposition and yes, let's not dissimulate or disguise the fact that with the launch of PlayStation 4 you do have to subscribe to PlayStation Plus if you want to play online multiplayer. We have made step-changes both in the functionality and the robustness of our network and I think those changes were needed." Ryan is right – last generation, the PSN's infrastructure lagged sorely behind Microsoft's; frequent service disruptions and server issues were the root of the problem, but paled in comparison to 2011's security breach, whereupon 77 million account holder's details were compromised, resulting in the service shutting down for 24 days.

"[The revisions we've made] come at a price and somewhere along the way – as a corporation accountable to share holders – that money has to be recovered. You can do that a few ways, you can put the price of the hardware up, or you can put the price of the games up, or you can invite those consumers that are using that network functionality to pay for it and, by the way, they're getting a whole bunch of other stuff – free games, discounts, early access – so we're not hiding the fact that we're asking people to pay for multiplayer. I think we've done it a way that's been proper, and fair, and that's been reflected in the reaction. You know, UK consumers are not shy of complaining when they feel they've been exploited and we really haven't had that."

Project Morpheus is taking aim Oculus Rift's VR dominance; whether or not there's room for two headsets remains to be seen...

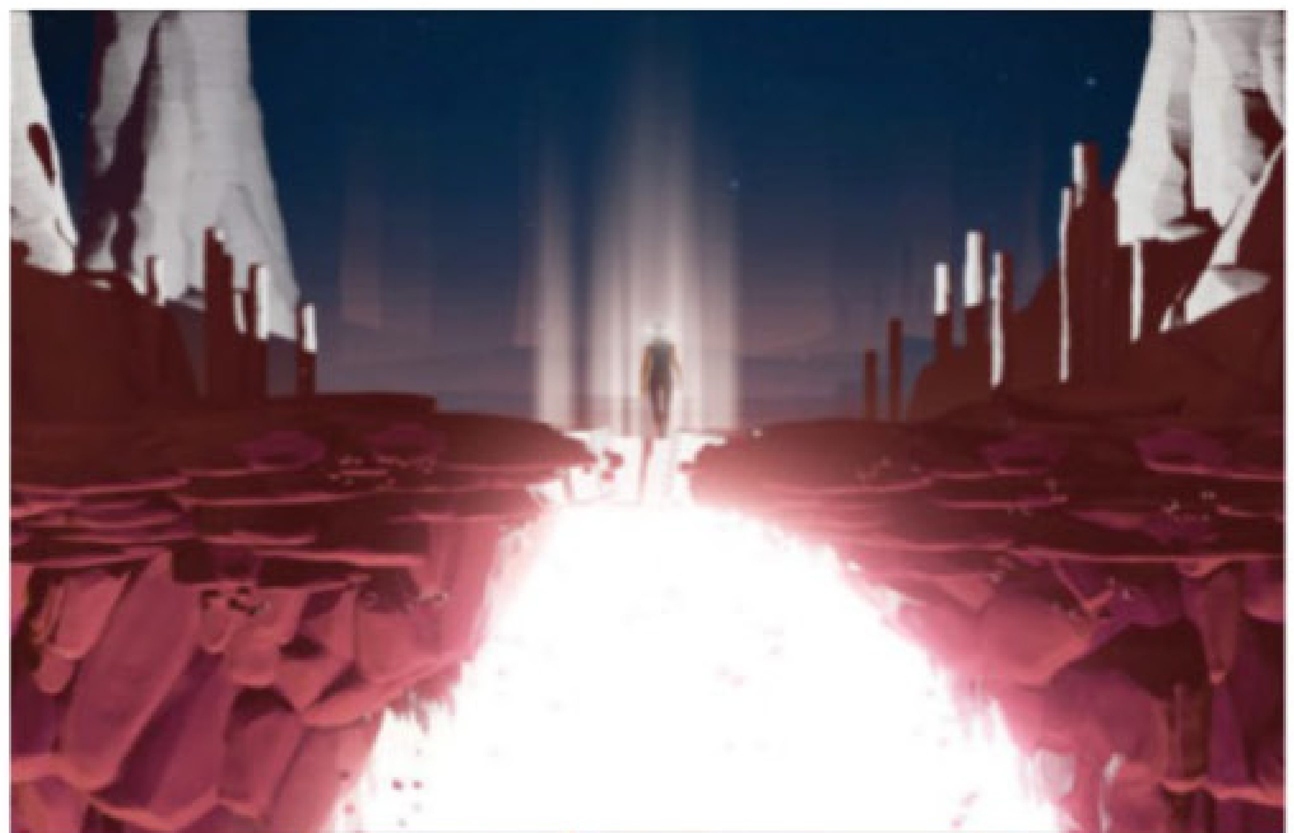


It seems Sony has managed to hit upon that fine balance between monetising its services and products and keeping its patrons satisfied. Going forward, Sony will have to continue to offer services of equal or better value to keep the public onside – last generation saw a tidal shift in public opinion with Microsoft as PlayStation Plus severely undermined the value-for-money offered by Xbox Live. The PS4 has a strong lineup of exclusives pencilled in for late 2014 and throughout 2015, alongside early access to third-party betas (most notably, *Destiny* which Ryan totes as a "system-seller") and – a big plus – exclusive content for *GTA V*. But will Sony's strategy, post-E3, be robust enough to see the company maintain favour with consumers as Microsoft rallies from a fairly disastrous first year for the Xbox One?

"We've navigated the lifecycles of platforms on a number of occasions now and we've an idea of how to do it and it'll be about driving as far and as deep as we can but at the same time developing that innovation too. Project Morpheus, if we decide that that's a road we're going to go down some more, is an example – we'll have plenty to do with that and building PlayStation Now as a strategically fundamental part of our strategy in the medium and long term, there'll be a lot of work building that up."

It's an interesting point Ryan raises – the PlayStation Now initiative, running alongside PlayStation TV, has the potential to extend the brand to non-gamers, or those with only a passing interest in the sector. Sony exists beyond the gaming branch synonymous with PlayStation, and seeing games on the companies TVs, projectors, tablets and phones could prove to be another blow to competitors that focus solely on one outlet. PlayStation, essentially, has the potential to be the Apple of the entertainment world.

"PlayStation Now, if done correctly, really has the potential to explode the target audience because the barrier to entry of needing a console to play PlayStation games is suddenly removed. I think if we do it right – and it's a *big* if – the future is potentially extremely interesting," concludes Ryan. "It's going to be a busy year."






There are a huge number of PlayStation exclusives coming up across the many platforms the company has under its belt in the coming year, building on strong franchises the company's been militant in developing over the last generation

"A YEAR AFTER THE PS4, WE DIDN'T WANT TO JUST BE SITTING ON OUR LAURELS"
SCEE PRESIDENT, JIM RYAN



Sony's savvy remastering of *The Last of Us* will tempt last-gen users over to new hardware

One Year Later

The launch of the PS4 has been hugely beneficial to Sony – while the company's other sectors aren't performing particularly well, the games department continues to turn a good profit. Here's what Sony's last year looked like…

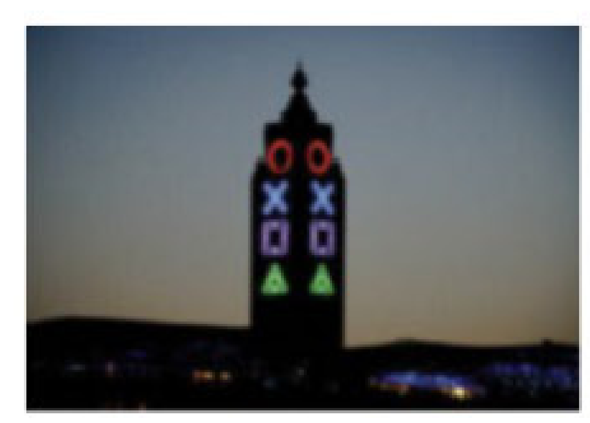
[June 2013] – E3
Sony blows viewers away with the PS4 and its short but intense list of games, clean UI and – frankly – Microsoft-beating conference



[August 2013] – Gamescom
PS4 release dates were revealed for NA, Mexico, Europe and Australia in Cologne, earlier than expected



[November 2013] Release
The PS4 sees a release across the majority of the gaming world, racking up over one million day-one sales



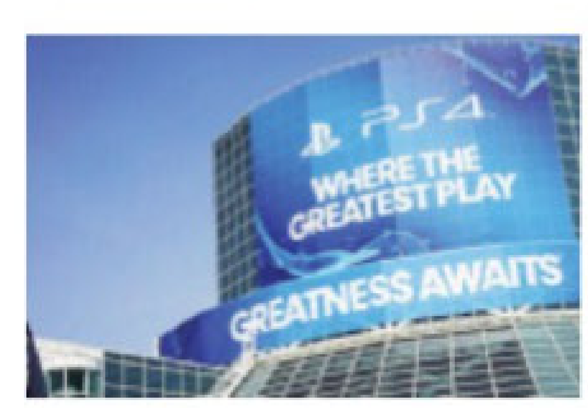
[February 2014] Japanese release
After a delay from the rest of the world, the console finally launches in Japan, along with a slew of Japan-only titles



[April 2014] 7 million sales
It's announced the PS4 hits 7 million sales, even outselling the Xbox One in the month *Titanfall* was released



[June 2014] E3, one year on
Sony keeps the momentum up with exclusives and also manages to surprise with a few unannounced games



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INDUSTRY QUESTIONNAIRE

FOR OUR 150TH ISSUE, WE DECIDED TO ASK AROUND THE GAMES INDUSTRY FOR A FEW THOUGHTS ON HOW OUR WORLD WORKS FROM THE INSIDE. TO REALLY SEE HOW THINGS WORK, WE DECIDED TO BLINDSIDE A FEW OF OUR RECENT INTERVIEWEES WITH A SPECIAL QUESTIONNAIRE...

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Issue 150 Anniversary Questionnaire

Name: GARY BRACEY
Company: KUJU / EX-OCEAN SOFTWARE

1. **What was the first game you remember playing?**
   COIN-OP: DONKEY KONG
   CONSOLE: SPACE INVADERS ON ZX81

2. **When you wake up and look at yourself in the mirror, what do you say to motivate yourself?**
   "WHAT'S BRAD PITT DOING IN MY BATHROOM?"

3. **How has the industry changed since you started working in it?**
   IMMEASURABLY! MOSTLY MORE MATURE, PROFESSIONAL AND STRESSFUL. FUN? NOT SO MUCH.

4. **If you could change one thing about any game you've worked on, what would it be?**
   I'D LOVE TO UPDATE A NUMBER OF THE OLD 8-BIT GAMES – UPGRADED FOR CURRENT MOBILE/TABLET

5. **What one piece of advice would you give someone trying to get into the indust**
   APART FROM 'DON'T'? I'D SAY L TO EVERYONE WHO HAS AN INFOR OPINION AND DON'T JUST ASSUM THAT A GAME YOU'D LIKE IS NECESSARIL FOR THE MASSES

6. **If you could go for a drink with any playable character, who would it be**
   LARA CROFT, OF COURSE! OR FAT PRINCESS IF I WAS INCREDIBLY PISSED

games™

Issue 150 Anniversary Questionnaire

Name: Miles Jacobson
Company: Sports Interactive.

1. **What was the first game you remember playing?**
   Tennis (basically Pong...) on a Grandstand console in the 70's, which was amazing! ...Until my friend got an Intellivision, which I was jealous of


2. **When you wake up and look at yourself in the mirror, what do you say to motivate yourself?**
   I don't tend to look in mirrors very often, which possibly explains my dress sense. I get to make games with an amazing team of people for amazing people. That's motivation enough!

3. **How has the industry changed since you started working in it?**
   Everything is bigger, yet smaller. It's kind of going full circle on the development side of things, from bedrooms to triple-A, and now back to bedrooms again. There are also less vodka-jelly shots at trade-shows.

4. **If you could change one thing about any game you've worked on, what would it be?**
   Whilst this will be an unpopular answer amongst the CM/FM faithful, no to Madiera.

5. **What is your favourite game of all time?**
   Starquake on the ZX Spectrum

6. **If you could go for a drink with any playable character, who would it be and why?**
   One of the tech advisors in Civilisation so that I could find out what future technology is and beat Google to releasing it to market.



> "EVERYTHING IS BIGGER, YET SMALLER… FROM BEDROOMS TO TRIPLE-A"



PRESIDENT EVIL.

FROM RESIDENT EVIL TO THE EVIL WITHIN, VIA GOD HAND AND VANQUISH, SHINJI MIKAMI IS THE KING OF SURVIVAL HORROR. AND, UNTIL RECENTLY, WOULD HAVE BEEN THE FIRST TO ADMIT THAT HE HAD NO INTENTION TO MAINTAIN HIS RULE. BUT NOW, AS THE GENRE DRIFTS FROM ITS ROOTS, HE HAS COME TO RECLAIM HIS CROWN

Shinji Mikami is a man who strikes fear into the heart of gamers. In fact, he has made something of a career out of it. But today, as he quietly contemplates the impending release of *The Evil Within* – his much anticipated return to survival horror – there's a dark notion sure to send a cold shiver trickling down the spine: this may very be the designer's directional swansong.

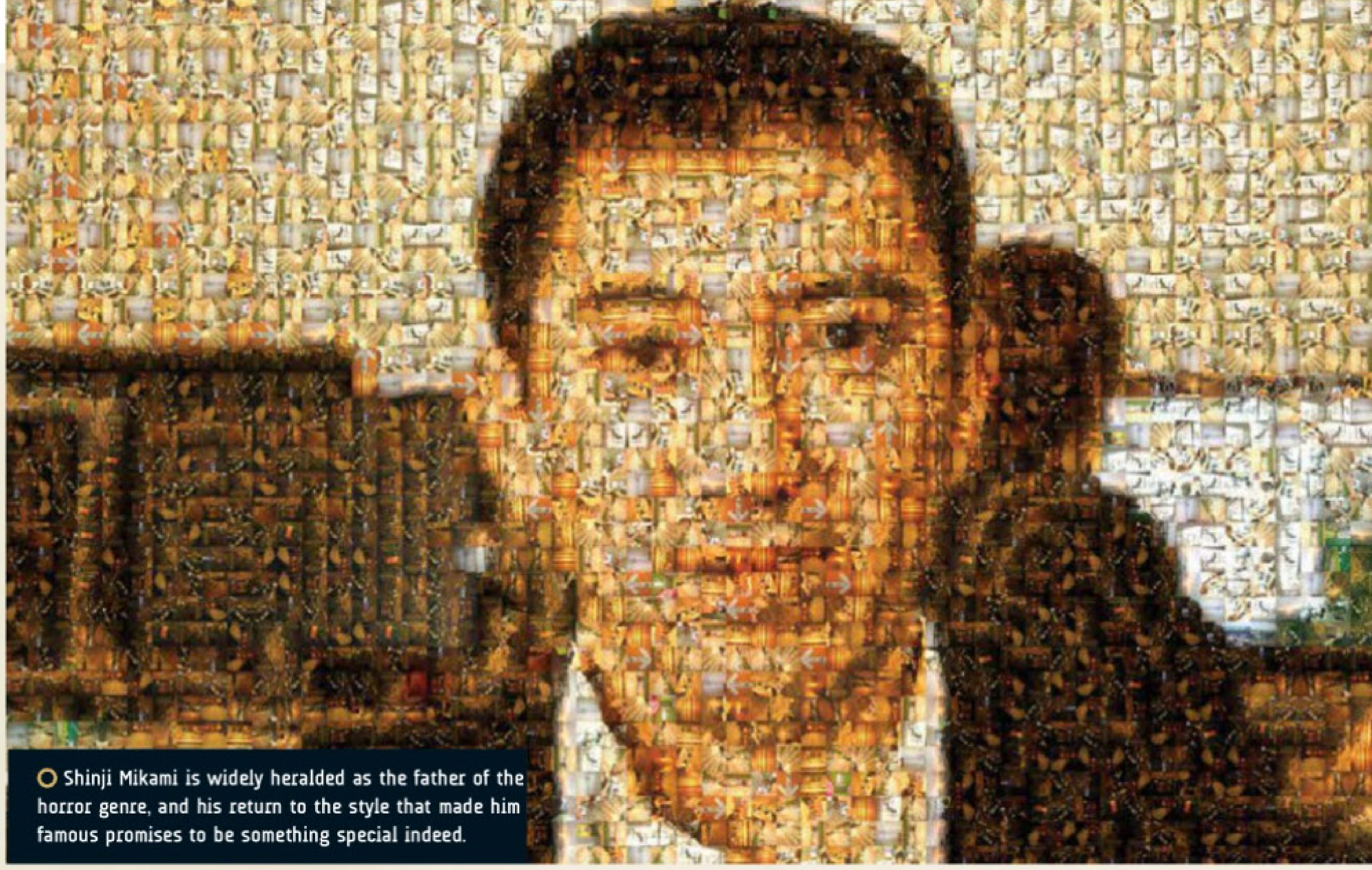
The fact remains that Mikami never saw himself having the enduring career in videogames that he's had. Growing up in the Yamaguchi Prefecture in Japan, Mikami had dreams of becoming a Formula One driver before turning to more academic ventures. While his interest in videogames during his adolescence was minimal, his passion for American cinema travelled with him into adulthood.

"*Dawn Of The Dead* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* were my influences," he remembers, before recalling the terrifying scenes that would later inspire his formative years in the games industry. The resonant mechanical growl of Leatherface's whirling chainsaw, or the schlocky scares of Raimi's *The Evil Dead*.

He would tip his hat to the godfathers of cinematic horror in his inaugural directional effort, *Resident Evil*, but before he was awarded his own project, Mikami cut his teeth on licenced titles such as *Aladdin* and *Goof Troop* when he joined Capcom in 1990 (due to more the company's reputation rather than a desire to make videogames). After *Aladdin*'s sizeable success, Capcom had charged Mikami with developing a direct sequel to *Sweet Home*, a popular Famicom game based on a Japanese horror movie. The resulting game, known as *Biohazard* in Japan, involved several characters trapped in an ominous building, being hunted by flesh-eating zombies and contorted creatures. It was the creative avenue that finally enabled Mikami to siphon his passion for American horror into a progressive creative medium.

But rather than the works of Romero, Raimi or Hooper's, perhaps more telling is his admiration of »





Shinji Mikami is widely heralded as the father of the horror genre, and his return to the style that made him famous promises to be something special indeed.

Jaws. The unforgettable whirlpool of tension, horror, characterisation and action that, in many ways, draws closer parity to the developer's work than other more visceral creations. The last scene in particular had, in his own words, a "profound influence" on Mikami – wherein the carnivorous force of chaos emerges from the deep blue once more to reap devastation on the characters, who in turn utilise guns and explosives to overcome evil. From this insight it's easy to see where *Resident Evil 4* took some of its inspiration from. His last entry in the *Resident Evil* canon reimagined horror through the bombastic prism of blockbuster entertainment. The over-the-shoulder viewpoint and snap-trigger aiming boasted a matchless precision and mechanical slickness that instantly became industry standard.

"Most people recognise *Resident Evil 4* as being a survival horror game," Mikami muses, "but when I set out to make the game the idea was to make an action game with horror essence." This "essence" that Mikami refers to is a salient point. Despite the mechanics leaning out of the franchise's native genre, it retained a relentless sense of chilling tautness, a sense of foreboding matched with genuinely unsettling imagery that harkened back to his early love of horror cinema. But not everyone was on the same page as Mikami. What other developers saw was a new era of survival horror, one that butchered the fragility of pacing and suspense in favour of setpieces and ammo stock.

"I don't think survival horror has really changed as a genre," he says, before highlighting his disappointment in the industry's mishandling of the survival horror concept. "For games in the survival horror genre in general, they tend to become more action oriented as sequels are released. So in that respect [they] may not be a survival horror game in its truest form." This frustration would be the summoning call to arms to inspire Mikami to step out of the shadows and attempt to restore survival horror to its former glory.

"What scares me now?" Mikami considers for a moment before a grin breaks across the 48-year-old's face. "My wife!" It's disarming moment of joviality from the earnest director but it's also a



veiled criticism at the industry. Mikami talks of his disillusionment by the state of modern horror, not just in gaming, but even in his first love of cinema – "It's unfortunate, but I feel the energy of horror movies has gone somewhat stagnant," he laments. This feeling was also partially what galvanises Mikami to return to survival horror, likewise the burgeoning demand from a new generation of gamers for a truly terrifying virtual experience that had been absent from the medium for several years.

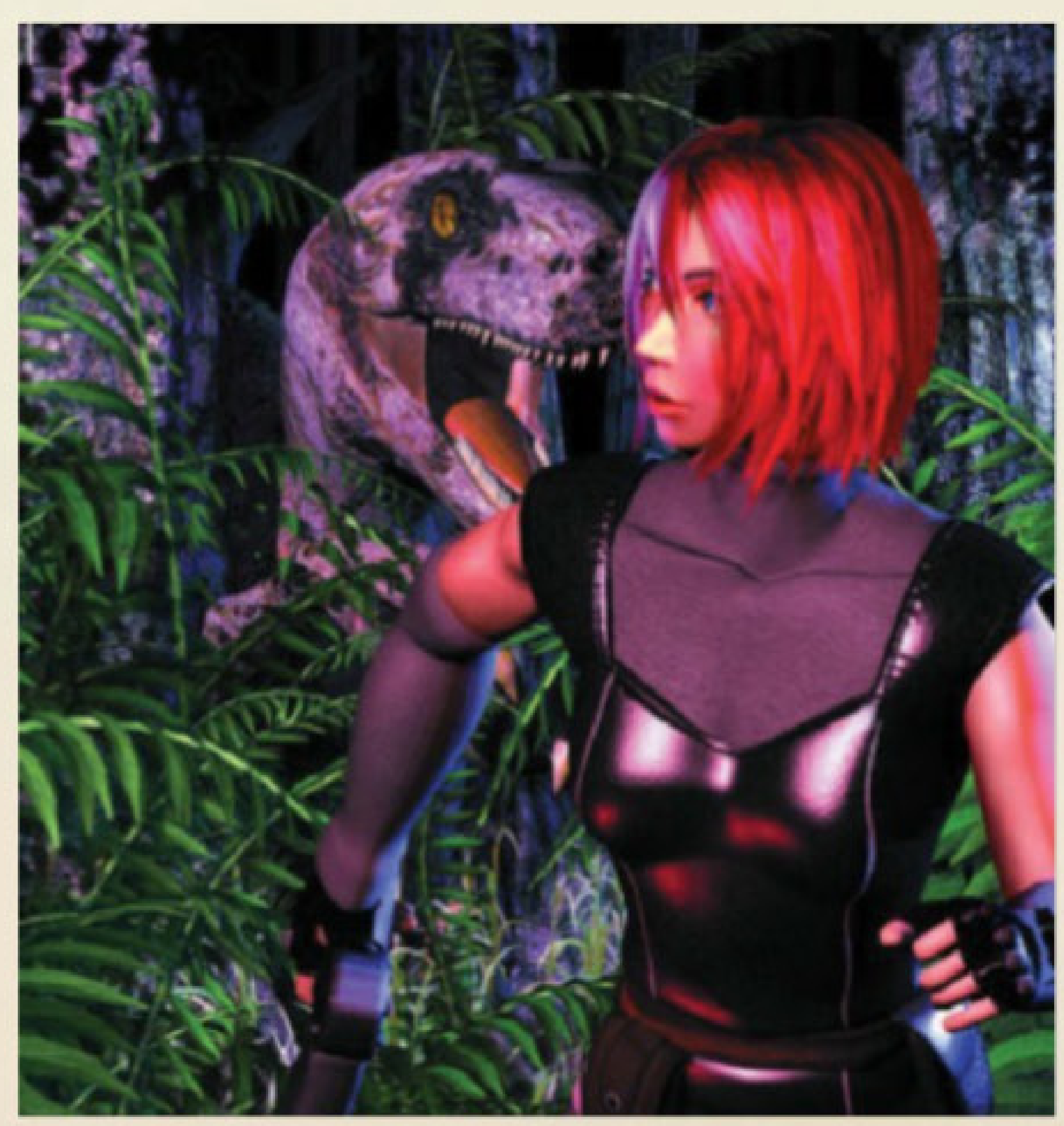
"A lot of the indie games are true horror games in my opinion," he compliments. "I believe for an indie game to be successful it really needs to stand out on its own, have a very clear identity and be targeted towards that genre's specific audience." However, there's a caveat: "Those titles didn't really influence *The Evil Within*," says Mikami. "A survival horror game is its own unique genre – it's neither true horror nor an action game."

Highlighting the distinction between his own approach and the degeneration of the genre, he describes his own personal method for success when it comes to survival horror. "Rewinding a little bit, the very first time I got the chance to make a horror game was *Resident Evil 1*," says Mikami. "But I knew if I made the game as a true horror game it would mean that it would lose some of the 'entertainment' appeal as content. Running around and just trying to survive the entire game would just be too stressful. So in order to make it appeal to a wider audience I made the game a little softer. If you think of it as a beverage it would not be water or juice but more like an alcoholic drink. Not wine or sake but beer, an alcoholic beverage consumed by most adults. Beer was the positioning of *Resident Evil*."

And it's fair to say that gamers drank it up; the industry intoxicated with the formula until the creative tap had dried up. The *Resident Evil* franchise, while still ambitious, has mutated into a creature unrecognisable when measured against Mikami's original design;



It wouldn't be a horror game without a faceless monster in rubber overalls walking menacingly through some kind of derelict facility, would it?



TOP 5 SHINJI MIKAMI MOMENTS



AFRAID OF THE BARK

■ One of Mikami's most effective scares was also one of his simplest. Leading players into a false sense of security and perfectly utilising the static camera, the heart-in-mouth terror of reanimated dogs crashing through the mansion window still sends us several feet in the air today.



THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS

■ Originally handing over directional duties on *Resident Evil 4* to Hideki Kamiya, Mikami saw the potential in the action-orientated approach Kamiya was taking and decided to make the game independent from *Resident Evil*. The result was the superb *Devil May Cry*.



CHAINSAW MASSACRE

■ Mikami lists *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* as one of his horror influences and he paid suitable homage to Tobe Hooper's slasher flick in *Resident Evil 4*. An iconic fear-inducing menace, Chainsaw Man is a hulking bullet-sponge who can cleave pasty-faced Leon Kennedy clean in half.



MONORAIL!

■ When you weren't busy performing slip-sliding acrobatics in *Vanquish*, the campaign comfortably rivalled any other third-person action game of its ilk. Standing out from its raft of kinetic missions is the monorail chapter that left the player nowhere to hide from the onslaught of bullets and missiles.



JURASSIC LARK

■ Stalking the protagonists throughout the entire campaign of *Dino Crisis*, the T-Rex is a nemesis that emerges to cause chaos when least expected – much like the shark in *Jaws* (another of Mikami's influences). Bursting through the police station's walls, it's one of the best frights in the game.

"I THINK THE SENSE OF 'HOW THE HECK AM I GONNA MAKE IT OUT OF THIS SITUATION ALIVE?' IS WHAT PLAYERS ARE LOOKING FOR IN HORROR GAMES NOWADAYS"

Silent Hill has all but lost the potency and allure that its suffocating mist once held; and other horror franchises such as *Alone In The Dark* and *Fatal Frame* rarely spring out of the shadows today. In Mikami's opinion, publishers have lost touch with their audience, which has resulted in this nebulous redefinition of what survival horror should be.

"When it comes to what players want from a horror game, it seems to me they want to play more of an adventure type game rather than an action type game," he says. "Where player's skills are less required and more emphasis is put on the scary atmosphere. I think the sense of 'How the heck am I gonna make it out of this situation alive?' is what players are looking for in horror games nowadays."

The few sequences that **games™** has played (or should that be survived?) certainly illustrate Mikami's point. Simplistic puzzles are bolstered by inventive scares. Unlocking a door becomes a mad scramble across a mansion that has the game's protagonist, Sebastian Castellanos, stumbling across disturbing medical experiments being carried out on conscious bodies. What's more horrifying is that for the player to progress, Castellanos must himself participate and choose to carry out horrific procedures in order to progress further through the haunted house.

Needless to say, there are few bumps in the night. Alongside the shambling cadavers that crave human flesh and the shock value of its setpieces, there's the omnipresent Ruvik – a prowling ghost that may terrorise the player at any moment. But this isn't all about jump scares, as Mikami has elegantly balanced more traditional horror staples with both psychological and body horror elements, while layering on top of these a survivalist sensibility.

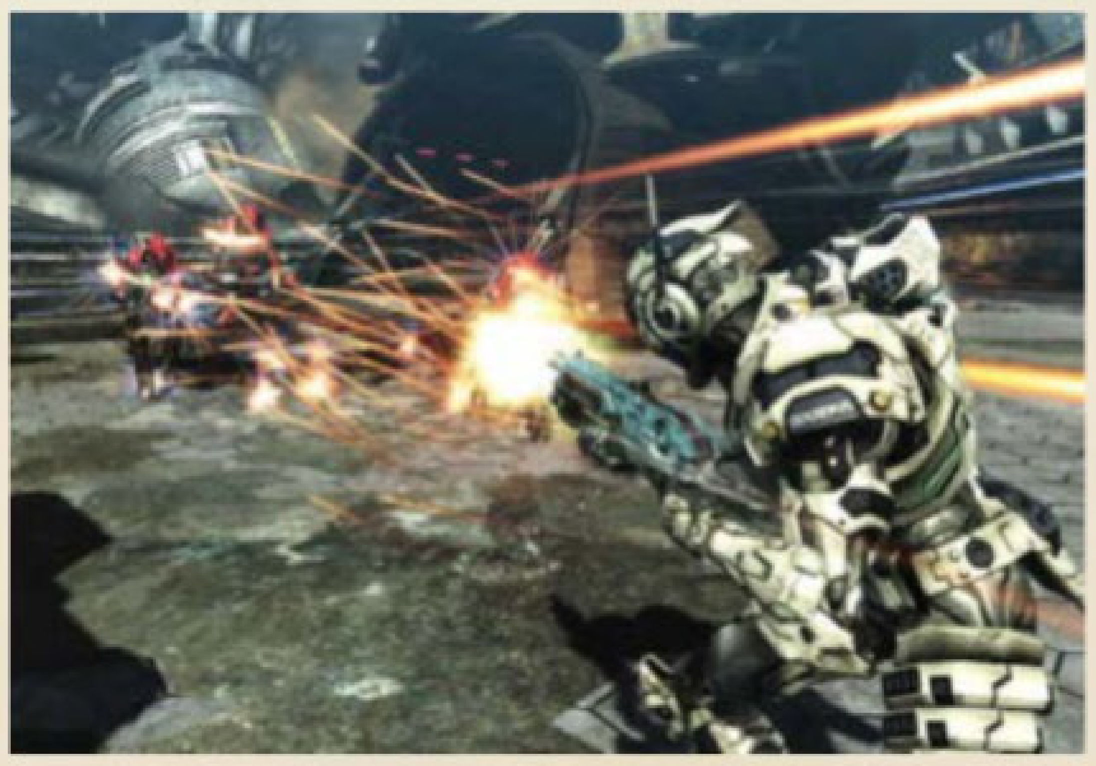
"Ammo and other resources are very limited when compared to games people consider as survival horror," says Mikami. "So guns can't always be your solution. You might have to find alternative ways to kill an enemy; maybe by sneak-kills or by using traps within the environment. The difficulty level we recommend people to play is called Survival Mode (i.e. normal or standard difficulty). I would be lying if I said that the game wasn't difficult. But I will say that the sense of relief when you do survive will be that much greater and more rewarding."

While you would expect all this to come naturally to Mikami, it's a jarring change of pace for the developer after working on fast-paced action games like *Vanquish*, *God Hand* and *Shadow Of The Damned*. "There is still a part of me that's used to that and perhaps that may have seeped through to this game in some parts," admits Mikami. "I didn't want to completely strip away the player character's mobility as it would become very stressful. I tried to keep the right balance by making the player character run a little faster than I would usually, for example. But with this game, since I wanted to go back to the roots of survival horror, I've consciously made it slower paced."

»







The Evil Within itself is something of a return to form for the director. While the content has grown more visceral in scope (owing a debt to *Saw* and the popularity of the splatter/gore horror sub-genre), simplicity triumphs in the design choices – a hallmark of Mikami's work. Indeed, where *Resident Evil* players were made to feel vulnerable due to the restrictive framing of the pre-determined camera angles matched with 3D polygonal characters, in *The Evil Within* Mikami hampers its protagonist with more realistic destabilising injuries or encumbering environmental impediments.

The results might be the same but one thing has changed: Mikami's approach to work. Long behind him are the days when he felt comfortable scrapping versions of a project years into development. "I think it's safe to say that it has changed," Mikami says of his mindset, before **games™** reminds him of *The Evil Within*'s original concept – a vampire-hunting action game starring a man and a woman attached by a chain. "I'm quite surprised you remember that idea," he laughs. "I received a lot of negative responses from within the dev team about making a vampire game, so we never pursued that idea. Right around the same time I was hearing many people say that they wanted another survival horror game. And that was the time when said to myself 'Okay I'll do it.'

"But when it comes to me as a director, there are some changes: for one, my health bar. I can no longer



Mikami is responsible for overseeing development on some of the most influential games the industry has seen, *Resident Evil 4* being a notable example.



"WHAT SCARES ME NOW? MY WIFE!"

work three months straight without a single day off. Depending on how you look at it, this is probably not a bad thing." Mikami has found support in the partnership between Bethesda and his new studio, Tango Gameworks. Mikami has had some of the biggest ups and downs in the industry, from the zenith of his early years at Capcom, to the nadir of Clover Studios' closure. Having worked on almost a freelance basis over the past several years, Tango has enabled him the creative freedom he has longed for since leaving Capcom in 2002. "Bethesda really understands game development and the creative process that goes into making a quality game," beams Mikami. "They respect creativity and they've been very supportive in times of need. They've been a great partner."

After founding Tango back in 2010, Mikami has been balancing operating the studio and making its debut title. This has led to him to consider stepping back from directing and letting other members of the team take over the reins. "After founding Tango there were challenges in the balancing act of running a studio and managing a dev team," he says. "But after joining the Zenimax family, I was able to focus my attention on a single project so that was a good change. But in the future I'd like to give opportunities to young thriving creators to develop small, but ambitious games."

The same question creeps up once again, whether this will be Mikami's final game as a director. He sidesteps this line of enquiry, instead offering a little sage wisdom about Tango Gamework's culture, suggesting that his role will always be a creative one at the studio, even if another talented designer steps forward into the limelight.

"For those of you wanting to become a game director, the most important thing to do is to trust yourself and your instincts," he concludes. "If you have an awesome idea, go make it. Another important thing is to believe in your team. You alone cannot make a game. A great game comes from great teamwork." And when the team in question has Mikami on its side, it seems that gamers will have a little less to fear in the future.



Inspiration comes from a wide variety of sources for Mikami and his team – outside of just videogames or horror movies… we want that *Easy Rider* poster.



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INDEPENDENT FEARS

Horror, once the bastion of triple-A releases, has found a new life through indies – which in turn have influenced the next generation of big-budget frightfests. It seems that, in games, everyone can hear you scream

Horror is back – *Alien: Isolation*, *The Evil Within* and *The Order: 1886* are all reintroducing us to the world of frights and fears we haven't seen at all since the heyday of *Resident Evil*, *Silent Hill 2* and *Eternal Darkness*. Well, that's the narrative we're supposed to follow, at least when we ask developers at these big-money productions where their influences lie. 'We look to what scares us,' they say, or quote a classic horror film and name-check Alfred Hitchcock.

What seems to be a fact in all of this is that the triple-A titles ignore what has spurred this mini-revival into being: the active, innovative and terrifying independent scene that has seen some of the most creative – and scary – horror games ever released. This crop of modern indie terror came about as gaps between mainstream horror titles widened and scares were diluted in favour of bigger guns and more cutscenes (because focus testing said that's what people want). So it was that the likes of *Amnesia: The Dark Descent*, *Lone Survivor*, *Outlast* and *DayZ* made up for our lack of triple-A shrieks. "I do think that a lot of the current game developers making horror games grew up inspired by *Silent Hill*, *Resident Evil*, *Alone in the Dark* and – for us – *System Shock 2*," Aaron Foster, lead designer and artist at Lunar Software admitted.

But the indies don't have the financial clout or manpower of bigger developers – surely it's a mistake to try and emulate the classic big guns of horror? Foster, whose team is working on space horror/mystery *Routine*, was not in agreement: "One thing I have realised when it comes to scaring someone is that the game doesn't need the visual polish of a triple-A studio. "It really doesn't – I think *Slender* is a perfect example of that… Indies can experiment a lot more with gameplay and really push strange and niche mechanics and themes in the search of just creating a terrifying experience."

That willingness and ability to experiment with form has lead to some incredible – and horrifying – experiences, not least of which the aforementioned *Amnesia*. One of the main people behind the game, Frictional Games' creative director, Thomas Grip, had some interesting thoughts on what his studio had created.

"I think I am most proud of making games that people have issues playing for longer sessions, yet still like," he said, "Much of the game industry is about doing addictive experiences, and it feels nice to have made a game that is almost the complete opposite. I love the fact that it takes some emotional effort from player to get through."

> ***"I think I am most proud of making games that people have issues playing for longer sessions, yet still like"***
> *Thomas Grip, creative director, Frictional Games*

Philippe Morin, co-founder of *Outlast* developer Red Barrels, let us in on his thoughts as to why the larger productions are rarely horror titles these days – clue: it's down to money. "Big publishers forgot about horror games because they were looking for ways to increase their market share," Morin said, "Horror games can be financially viable as long as the budget is reasonable. I doubt »



While it existed years before *Left 4 Dead*, *Killing Floor* didn't hit retail until after the success of Valve's game – showing it isn't always the indies influencing the big boys.



Lone Survivor was already loved, but it got a new lease of life after being released on PS Vita – now you could take your eerie horror on the move.

a horror game could make the same kind of money as *GTA* or *Call Of Duty* do, but there's definitely a demand. The same logic has been applied in the movie industry – you don't expect a horror movie to do as well as *Avatar* and that's why most of these movies are done on a much smaller budget."

So it was a natural path for the horror game to take, then? Maybe. Does it mean we'll see the *Paranormal Activity* of gaming? A movie made for some $15,000 that banked nearly $200 million? Will we see the *Minecraft* of horror games? "These are not the type of games where you brag about doing certain stuff, as you can do in *Minecraft* – it becomes a more personal thing as you talk about how scared you were and things like that. It is much more subjective in nature," Grip said.

"And this in turn means that a highly successful and culturally significant horror game becomes so in a way that is very different to games like *Call Of Duty*, *Minecraft* and *GTA*. So when 'The Minecraft of Horror games' comes, we will probably never note it as such. But that does not mean the possibility is not there."

So it's pretty much guaranteed that horror will hit the mainstream at some point? Not particularly, and Morin told us it would only go so far as the odd exception here and there. Why? "Horror is extremely subjective," he said, "People get scared by different things and sometimes they don't get scared at all. I don't think horror can be mainstream – but then again there's always going to be exceptions."

Foster agreed these few releases were not the sign of a revolution of terror in the mainstream: "I wouldn't say it's back when you talk about triple-A studios. Sure there are one or two, but that's hardly a resurgence of the genre in the mainstream. Plus I still think indies will offer the *really* dark and unique horror experiences you may not find with triple-A."

> ***"Horror is extremely subjective. People get scared by different things and sometimes they don't get scared at all"***
> *Philippe Morin, co-founder, Red Barrels*

Having said that, this by no means meant Foster thinks the genre has no place coming from the mainstream: "I think there are always going to be certain developers that will make horror games like Shinji Mikami," he said. "But the big surprise was a developer mainly known for RTS games making what looks like the *Alien* game we have always wanted… If *Alien: Isolation* does well financially then maybe other big studios will take notice, which isn't just good for horror fans but for all genres."

One fear, if you'll allow the pun, people have with bigger budget productions is how they often have elements of design-by-committee – can something really be scary if it's made for as wide an audience as possible? Grip voiced the same worry: " This is something that I am wary about when it comes to high budget horror games.

"In order to get a really nice horror game, you have to live with the fact that the game will be boring and not that exciting for a large part of the production. The proper feel of a horror game can come really late, so there is a lot of relying on your gut feeling. I think this is really hard to get do in a big team and when a lot of money is at stake."

Grip said that, aside from the difficulty in getting everyone in a large team on the exact same page from a thematic standpoint, it also proves very difficult to show convincing builds early on in a title's development – something key to the continued funding of a project. "Because of this," he said, "I think it is really easy to add a bunch of extra elements that lessen the horror. Just look at all of the weapon upgrading, etc, in the *Dead Space* series."

And Foster was in agreement – there are inherent hurdles in large-scale projects, not least of which a tradition of pacing and pricing: "I think there are a few big issues when releasing a triple-A horror game," he said, "One is the almost automatic choice of a high price tag because of the *huge* budget spent developing and marketing a game. Another is the gameplay padding in order to get you get your '15-hour experience' so that the user feels they got their £40 worth. But with that being said, I do think people can absolutely find something scary in mainstream horror games. Those people are not usually your big horror fans, though."

The huge productions do have many benefits, though, with the likes of the Creative Assembly being able to test and tinker with *Alien Isolation* a lot more before it is released. With smaller productions, that just isn't possible – and it introduces an interesting question:



Titles like *Resident Evil 6* are surely a reason why the horror genre has proven so popular with indies – it's so far removed from the series' original concept it seemed ludicrous.

TERROR EVOLVED

The more things change, the more we stick with zombies – at least that's what it seems like when you compare *Resident Evil* with *The Order: 1886*. Both games feature near-identical reveals of a creature feasting on a dead human. Gaming has had more than its fair share – to the point where games like *Dead Rising* and *DayZ* see the shambling ones as more of a slight obstacle than a truly terrifying undead fiend.

But generally, our tastes in horror haven't changed all that much over the years – one of the very first *Alien* games on C64 featured players trying their best to avoid and evade the titular horror beast. This year's *Alien: Isolation*? Much the same thing. Lovecraftian horror is another approach that's always been around, with the bizarro beasts of the original *Alone In The Dark* drawing no small inspiration from the creator of Cthulhu, while more modern titles like *Metro 2033* and *Stalker* still take insights from ol' H.P. Lovecraft.

There has been a tendency in recent years to go for the horror beast you don't see – or at least not much. The likes of *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* and *Slender* are masters of this art, scaring the pants off the player while not actually being too obvious. But far from being stuck in a rut, horror gaming just plays on our primal fears – darkness and the unknown – which haven't changed in thousands of years. It's hard to get that scared about zombies any more.










with such limited scope, how do you make sure a game is scary?

"It is dangerous to just rely on your own experience as it is easy miss nuances that can be important for an actual first time player," Grip said, "For instance you might think they notice certain elements that they do not… It is a difficult process of relying on feedback and your own experience."

Foster's comments had a similar sentiment – "Being so close to a project really removes all sense of fear and horror as you become numb to it. Honestly we still don't know if we can scare [people]" – while Morin also echoed this line of thought, saying: "It's really hard to take a step back and analyse your game objectively… Ultimately, you have to rely on your instincts and keep your fingers crossed."

But with horror being such a universal theme, it could be argued that a limited scope at the time of development is an aid to the fear-making process. Rather than being bogged down in an abundance of superfluous additional elements (take a bow, *Dead Space 3*), the creative process can focus on the one thing that really matters: scaring people. So where will horror gaming go in future?



It's taken a surge in popularity over a few years to do it, but the underdog indies are once again showing sway over the major publishers and the games they decide to fund.

"I think that games like *Amnesia*, *Slender* and *Outlast* have been part of showing that it is commercially viable at least," Grip said, "This type of thing tends to come in waves though, so it might just be part of a general zeitgeist." Even if it is just a flavour of the week thing, we've seen the upcoming releases from big studios and they're looking excellent. *Alien: Isolation* especially looks like it could be *the* game to reintroduce horror to the mainstream on a scale most indies could only dream of.

But there are other productions, like Frictional Games' *Soma* and Lunar Software's *Routine*, coming from independent studios. And they'll have to be different. They'll have to diversify to be in any way relevant, otherwise they'll be lost in a sea of 'run from the monster/fight loads of zombies/survive in a hostile environment' chillers. Grip recognised this unavoidable fact: "Right now many of the horror games popping up are all about 'run from monster' at the core. If this continues I think there will be a certain fatigue in the audience, as the experiences will all be very alike.

"What is good about this is that in order to stand out, you need to move away from this more simplistic design. So while we will have a big pile of similar looking games, there should also be more and more titles that try to take it further. Interactive horror get really, really hard to do once you move away from the more simplistic approach though, so a worst case scenario would be that we see no successful attempts at going further and the genre fades away."

But that's far too negative a point to end on, so it's fortunate that Grip is actually very positive about the future of horror gaming: "At Frictional we are working hard at taking things further, and you see other games like *The Vanishing Of Ethan Carter* that try to tread new ground. I have high hopes we will see more and more sophisticated horror popping up the coming years."



The internet's own invention, it was no surprise to see a few games pop up around the Slender Man. What was surprising is how well they tap into the fear of the unknown.



WHY I ♥...

COMMAND & CONQUER: TIBERIUM SUN

FREDERIC MENOU, MANAGING DIRECTOR, WARGAMING.NET

“*I think* Command & Conquer: Tiberium Sun *was one of the first games I ever played, and even with the crappy modems at the time, you could get this amazing feeling of what online gaming was becoming. It took 25 minutes to launch a game, and even then one out of two games matches wouldn't work. But when you finally got a game, that sense of being online and playing with someone else in the world was insane to me. The* C&C *experience – and that competitive aspect of online gaming that I love so much – that defined me. It was a great game.*”



"Even with the crappy modems at the time, you could get this amazing feeling of what online gaming was becoming"

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Reviews

108

WILDSTAR

Does WildStar have what it takes to breathe satisfying new life into the science fiction/fantasy MMO?





THE AVERAGE

Three of the numbers in a ten-point scale are of greater importance than the others: five, seven, and of course, ten. Some publications would fool you into believing that a 7/10 game is average, but that just doesn't make sense to us. **games™** reviews videogames on their entertainment value, and so any title that simply performs to an adequate standard will receive a 5/10. Simple. The elusive ten is reserved for games of incredible, irrefutable quality, but please be aware that a score of ten in no way professes to mean perfection. Perfection is an unattainable goal, and on a ten-point scale nothing should be unattainable. Again, simple. Our reviews are not a checklist of technical features with points knocked off for flaws, neither are they a PR-pressured fluff-fest – we'd never let that happen, and besides you'd smell it a mile off. And finally, the reviews you find within these pages are most certainly not statements of fact, they are the opinions of schooled, knowledgeable videogame journalists, designed to enlighten, inform, and engage. The gospel according to **games™**.













AGREE/DISAGREE?

games™ is always right. But that doesn't stop some people disagreeing. Think we've got a review horribly wrong? Or did we nail it?

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IT STILL SUFFERS FROM ALL THOSE SAME PROBLEMS THAT HAVE BEEN RAISED ABOUT ANY RECENT MMO; NAMELY, A LONG LIST OF ARBITRARY QUESTS THAT OFTEN OFFER LITTLE TO NO INTEREST

KEEP YOUR CREDD

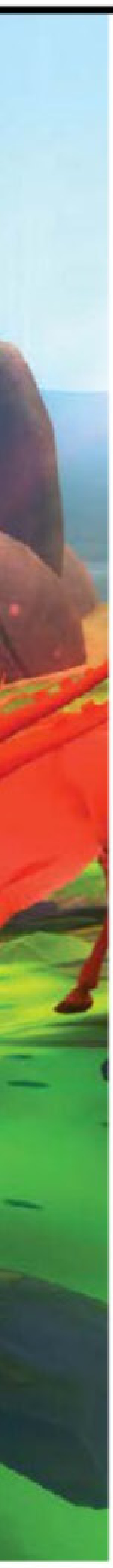
'I'll just wait for it to go free-to-play'; it'd be fair to assume that would happen, it has done with so many MMOs before it, after all. But *WildStar* utilises a similar function to *EVE Online* with its own CREDD Exchange, a means whereby you can extend your gametime by 30 days with the in-game item (named CREDD), which you purchase from other players. These can be bought for real-world cash, but if you've saved up enough in-game gold you can – in essence – keep yourself playing without ever paying a subscription fee. It worked for *EVE Online*, so there's no reason it can't work here: expect to see *WildStar* keeping its subscription model for quite some time.





COME WITH US NOW ON A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME AND SPACE

WildStar



DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: NCSOFT
DEVELOPER: Carbine Studios
PRICE: £29.99
RELEASE: 3 June 2014
PLAYERS: MMO
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes
MINIMUM SPEC: 2.4 GHz Dual Core CPU, 3GB RAM, 512MB GPU, 30GB HDD Space

Left: There are plenty of areas to visit and each have a unique story. Whether you can be bothered reading all that quest text is a different story. *WildStar*'s inability to draw attention to its questline is a fairly major flaw.

'Go big, or go home'. Undoubtedly a popular phrase, particularly in the games industry where iteration is often favoured over grand, sweeping changes. Yet not only does the phrase fit in with *WildStar*'s raucous attitude – more on *that* later – but it's also a term often used by key figures at Carbine to describe the developer's approach to *WildStar*, and more importantly how it is intending to tackle its competitors. Sadly, however, *WildStar* just might not be big enough. Of course that's not to criticise the game's content.

As with all MMOs there are hours upon hours to be lost on the planet of Nexus, and much like *World Of Warcraft* before it, half of the fun is visiting these varying locales. From frozen tundras and sun-ravaged plains to capital cities and corrupted countryside, *WildStar* has all the necessary rainbow of vistas checked off. As you might expect there's a plethora of characters to meet, quests to complete and the traditional crafting elements necessary to fill the time between killing mobs too. The art style of *WildStar* is enough alone to help distinguish itself from its peers, and while the stylised, caricature design is not exactly original for MMOs it's done with enough panache and (dare we say it) originality to feel fresh.

Nexus, you see, acts as a frontier of sorts – a landmass-driven gold rush as both playable factions (the Exile or the Dominion) seek to get a foothold and claim the planet for their own. There's a heap of lore and backstory filling in the blanks – most notably that of the mysterious disappearance of the technologically superior Eldan – that weaves neatly into the arc that you'll play through to level 50, some of it part of mandatory quests and some of it hidden in data cubes and codices dotted throughout the world. Lore-fans have plenty to get their teeth into here.

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

WATCH THE 'TUDE: While it might try to hammer home the quirky attitude a little too much (a narrator will call you 'cupcake' much more than he ought to), it gives it some much-needed humour in a genre too keen to stay po-faced.

Admittedly it suffers in this regard for the lack of a franchise to pin itself onto: *World Of Warcraft* had its factions pre-baked, *Final Fantasy XIV* riffs on franchise tropes while *The Elder Scrolls Online* is… well, *The Elder Scrolls*. *WildStar* has to try harder to draw you in, and to its credit the distinct personality helps to manage just that. Maybe it won't be enough to have you reading reams of optional text to learn every facet of the world, but it *is* there and that's really the most important feature for any MMO. The universe needs to be rich and deep, and without fleshed-out details for every minute element of the game, an MMO with a new IP is likely to plummet – mercifully *WildStar* survives this particular criticism.

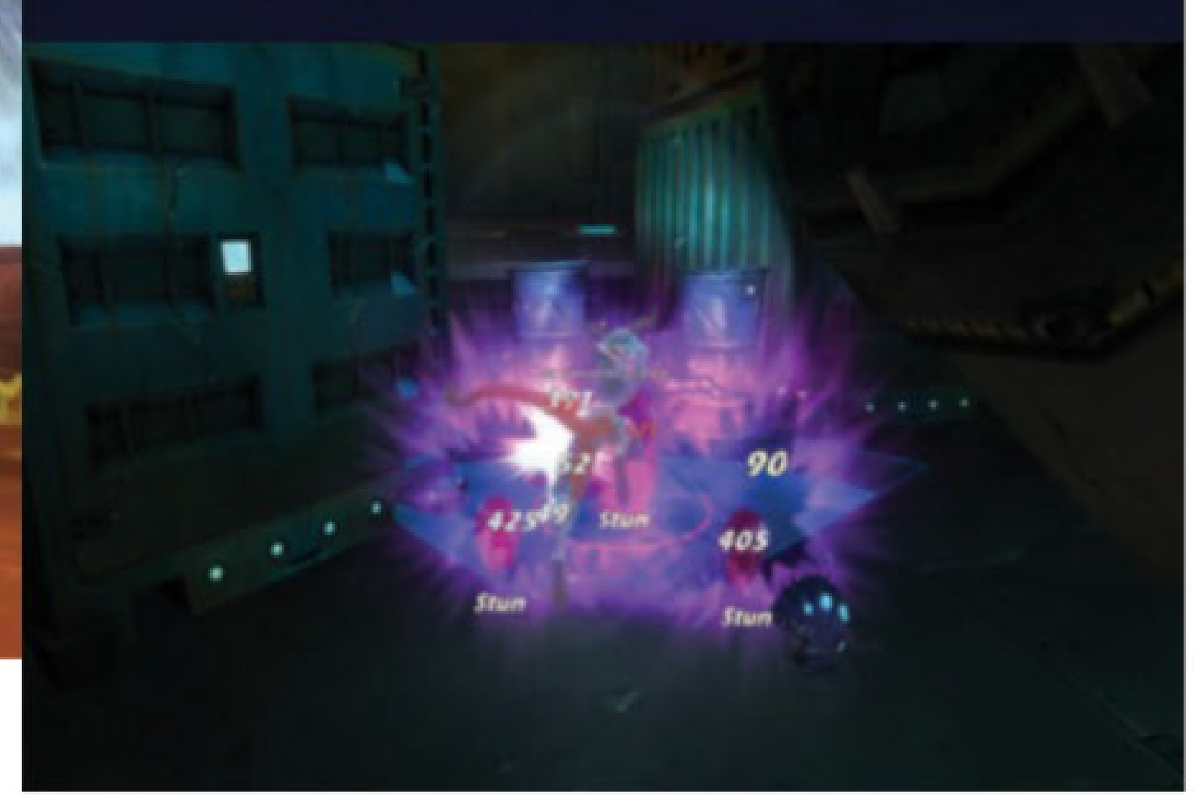
With that said, however, it still suffers from all those same problems that have been raised about any recent MMO; namely, a long list of arbitrary quests that often offer little to no interest. It's a huge problem because while *World Of Warcraft* might have set the tone for MMO questing, it has seemingly become a genre convention in itself. *WildStar* will have you skim-reading quest text, heading out to pre-arranged areas, slaughtering the wildlife or other NPC antagonists, collecting specified bits and – on occasion – activating an object or two. That's largely the crux of it. There are twists on these traditions, thankfully, but it's in no way more inventive than *World Of Warcraft*'s own attempts in recent times. Vehicles and temporary alterations to your character – such as speed, jump height or even appearance – will be familiar to anyone who's stuck with *WoW* since *Wrath Of The Lich King*.

There's no disguising the lacklustre quests – and, honestly, there's no excusing it either – but *WildStar* saves face in two key ways: its combat and the Path class tree. While action-based combat has become increasingly



Above: *WildStar* is a surprisingly challenging game after the first handful of levels – kind of like *World Of Warcraft* before Blizzard tried to make it more accessible.



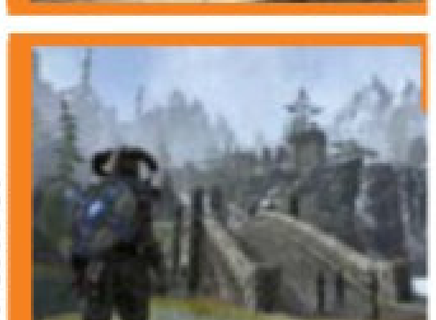


FINAL FANTASY XIV

BETTER THAN



AS GOOD AS



THE ELDER SCROLLS ONLINE

Left: You're limited to eight combat abilities at any one time so, much like *Guild Wars*, it's about picking from a wide selection that best suits your personal tastes. It also means you're not required to have an unhealthy number of icons filling the screen at any one time.

popular in MMOs of late, *WildStar* takes that just a little bit further. Every attack affects a particular area, regardless of whether you're a ranged or melee combatant – friend or foe alike. There's no focus on targeting – at least in the fashion we've come to know it – and instead it's about lining up as many enemies as possible and unleashing your string of chosen abilities. With quick cooldowns, speedy resource regeneration and none of the minutiae of combat management that most MMOs suffer from, *WildStar*'s combat manages to feel novel. Fun, even. Naturally each class plays a little differently, from melee-focused Warriors and Stalkers to ranged DPS such as Spellslingers and Espers; but with a difference. Picking from a mix of Assault, Support and Utility abilities, it's possible to customise your builds around how you want to play – and also what roles you want to fill. Tanks, healers, damage dealers and support roles are possible with almost any classes, and while some are better suited to particular situations it's possible to tailor your favourite class to your favourite role – for once, the two aren't interdependent.

Then there's your Path class, an additional choice during character creation on top of race, class and faction. Here you're picking from Soldier, Scientist, Explorer or Settler, but in essence what you're choosing is *how* you want to enjoy playing the game. It is locked in from then on and therefore a bit of a blind pick in that regard, but a neat extra feature all the same. Your Path class unlocks a string of quests unique to that category, and these are numerous and scattered throughout the world. Soldiers are for those who favour combat, with Path quests associated with excessive amounts of killing. Scientists seek to learn about the world around them and can scan objects, flora and fauna to gain extra benefits and knowledge. Settlers – as you might expect – seek to expand into the world, building structures large and small to provide assistance to their fellow players. This could be stations that provide additional buffs to any player that interacts with them, or even grander projects that unlock marketplaces, spaceports and taverns – bringing with them a whole heap of extra rewards.

Lastly there are Explorers, a Path class built for the gamer who wants to see everything a game has to offer. The quests here aim to have you reaching the tallest (and sometimes deepest) points in the game, looking for routes up the side of a mountain you previously thought inaccessible or in among the shrubberies for surveillance gear. It's a shame that these weren't the focus of *WildStar*'s questline because, Soldier class excluded, it's this set of objectives that really emphasise what any MMO is all about – its world. Explorer objectives in particular are far more compulsive than any 'proper' quest; these Path roles have you interacting more personally with the world, be it tracking down very precise locations or gathering up resources to help build that important communal Settler project. In many ways it feels *WildStar* would've been a much more impressive – and innovative – entry into the genre if it had forgone the traditional questing solely for these more world-focused jobs.

For the rest of it, *WildStar* ticks the same old boxes you'd expect to see in the checklist: dungeons and instanced challenges, PvP in a variety of flavours and all the usual periphery with mounts, crafting and in-game achievements. It'd be unfair to expect an entire overhaul of the typical systems, especially for elements that many consider to be key parts of any MMO such as player versus player combat. *WildStar* caters to every taste of PvP, whether typical modes (capture the flag, domination and the like), smaller arena-based battles or huge-scale 40v40 Warplots. The larger the number of players, however, the more infuriating the battle can be, especially for melee-based classes. The AOE-only nature of *WildStar*'s mechanics makes each and every PvP fight above 5v5 becomes something of a keyboard-bashing roulette. Objective-based goals means there's commonly a bottleneck of sorts, and the victor is almost always the side with the larger group of players – more AOE correlates to more damage dealt. There's very

FAQs

Q. IS IT FUNNY?
Not funny per se, but there's a cheery humour to everything in the world of *WildStar* – which makes the grind that bit more enjoyable.

Q. WESTERN SCI-FI?
It won't be the first and it won't be the last to cross over the two themes, but it works. The sci-fi additions are a little too obvious (short, furry engineers for example), but stylistic enough.

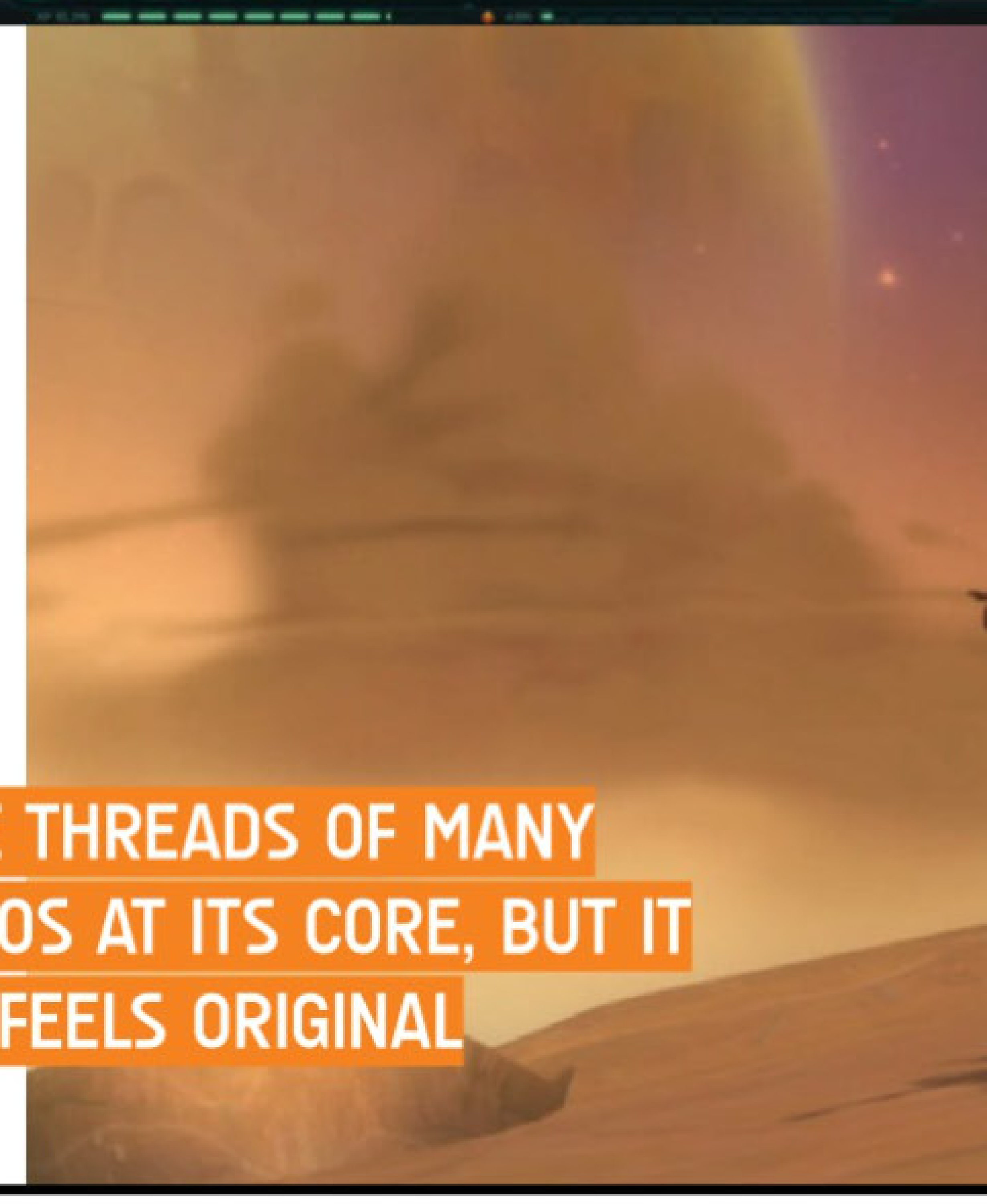
Q. ENDGAME?
Raids, reputation and gear progression will be the ultimate endgame (as with so many MMOs) but bespoke Post-Cap Playspaces will mean solo players can grind in peace.



Right: There are a good deal of cutscenes throughout the lengthy questline to level 50, and they help to introduce the personalities of recurring NPCs.



Right: Path quests are much more interesting than the traditional quests because while their objectives aren't particularly that inventive, they cater the game to how you want to play and have you working a little more to explore the world. That's always a good thing for an MMO.



THERE ARE THREADS OF MANY OTHER MMOS AT ITS CORE, BUT IT SOMEHOW FEELS ORIGINAL



Below: Player housing even allows you to pick the angle of your decoration. Such is the level of customisation available with the optional extra.



TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

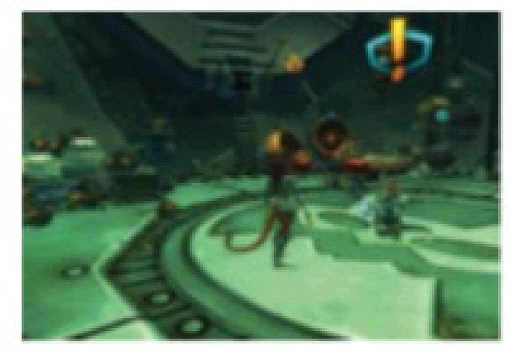
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

15 MINS



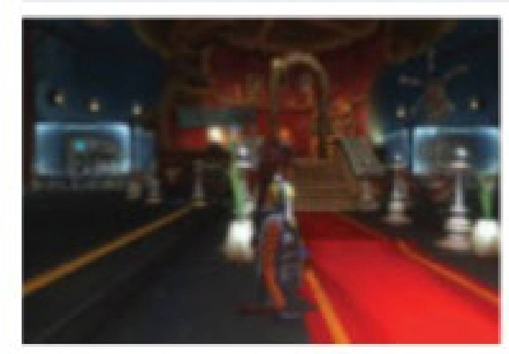
At this point you'll likely be happy with the character you've created, but there are plenty of customisation options available to you – so choose wisely.

10 HOURS

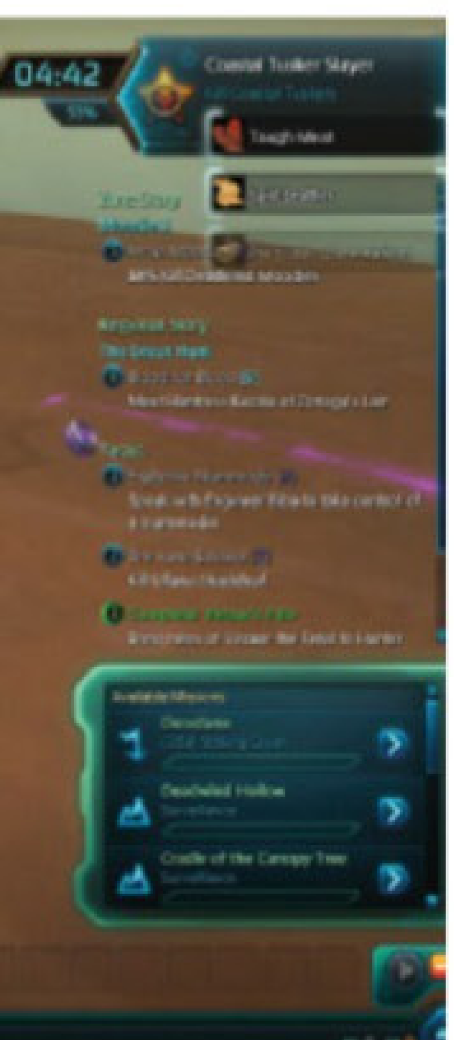


You'll likely have ticked off each of the elements the game has to offer by now: PvP, dungeons and maybe even grabbed your first mount. Still a hell of a lot to explore.

3 DAYS



You still won't have reached max level at this point, but chances are you'll already have an alt or two as you head off to explore those other varied starting areas.



DEATH BY NUMBERS

Sticking true to *WildStar*'s belligerent need to do things differently, it has opted out of the typical statistics that power up your character for its own variation. The core set are Assault Power and Support Power, and that's the simplest it can be – Assault for attack damage (regardless of class) and Support for utility and healing abilities. Then there's Moxie, Grit, Finesse, Brutality, Tech and Insight and – to make matters worse – they affect different classes different. Tech, for example, increases a Warrior's Support Power, but improves a Medic's Assault Power or a Spellslinger's critical hit deflection. It's needless, perhaps, but in many ways it's refreshing to have to relearn underlying RPG attributes again – and it's honestly not nearly as complex as it sounds.



little direction to much of the PvP combat as a result, and while it makes sense to target any opposing healers over the tougher Warriors there's rarely time – or space – to think outside of trying to cover as large a group an area as possible. Contrary to PvP in most MMOs, then, it is the ranged classes that survive longer in multiplayer tête-à-têtes. It makes for frantic – perhaps even uncontrollable – fights; not necessarily worse than what we're used to with the genre, but not objectively better either.

Which is kind of the tune that *WildStar* is humming, really. There are threads of so many other MMOs woven into its core, but with enough tweaks and changes to somehow feel original all the same. Player housing is perhaps a strong example of that. Not content with simply giving you an identikit room to occupy, housing in *WildStar* is a far more elaborate affair. It's unlocked fairly early on – chances are you'll be a high enough level when you first arrive at the local capital city – and from then on you'll gradually add to it, grow it and – perhaps – even care for it. There's a great deal of customisation involved, and you'll unlock décor as you complete quests or collect it after slaying beasts, which can be added to your plot of land as and when you choose. Place it wherever you like, scale it to whatever size you prefer and even position it however you want. It seems droll to claim that the possibilities are endless, but disappointingly that perhaps best encapsulates the vastness of *WildStar*'s player housing. It's never been done with this much freedom before.

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

EPIC QUEST: We're sick of having to butcher arbitrary numbers of placated wildlife, and MMOs are suffering because of this one unnecessary trope. Kill the kill quests and stick to these much better Path quests.

Yet like so much of *WildStar*'s unique approach to tried-and-tested MMO mechanics, it's all too easy to claim it is change for change's sake. It'd be fair to argue that *WildStar* doesn't do enough to alter those underlying MMO mechanics – and that the genre will only continue to dwindle in the face of such limiting 'innovation'. But rather *WildStar* manages to breathe a little more life into the genre, like adding an extra little spice to a familiar recipe without entirely changing the dish. It is, in so many ways, the antithesis of *The Elder Scrolls* Online. Where Zenimax Online tackled *ESO* a little too po-faced, it ended up feeling too restricted by the staples holding the genre and the Elder Scrolls series together. *WildStar* certainly won't alter what we can expect from the MMO genre, but it manages to create an identity for itself all the same – and really that's the hardest job of all for any new MMO. It's an uphill struggle for Carbine from here on out, and it's only going to get tougher for the developer. But while *WildStar* might not be nearly as 'big' or brash as it would like to think it is, the beauty of potential is that one day it may well end up that way.

VERDICT 8/10

NOT TRULY INNOVATIVE, BUT ENOUGH CHANGE TO KEEP IT FRESH



Above: *Grid Autosport* is gorgeous enough on consoles, but it really takes things up a notch on the PC, running at a far slicker frame rate and with enough flourishes about to make it the recommended version, if you have a choice.

THE DRIVE OF YOUR LIFE, OR JUST OF 2014?

Grid Autosport

Seven minutes into an eight-minute endurance race, with no rewinds left and a slim lead over the rest of the pack, the stress becomes too much. We make a mistake. Traction is lost. The racing line a distant memory. We're overtaken, quickly dropping to seventh and, when it's all said and done, losing our podium placing in the overall championship.

And this is all on a medium setting. If there's one thing *Grid Autosport* absolutely nails, it's making things challenging on the out-of-the-box difficulty level. Initially you'll struggle at the back of the pack, and soon you'll be able to thunder forwards through your opponents – but all the time you're playing it, as long as it's not on very easy, you'll be challenged. And that's a brilliant, refreshing thing.

While you're trying to master the art of bumper-to-bumper racing in touring cars, it might then slip your mind that you have to pick up the art of racing in four other disciplines to make any discernible progress in *Autosport*. Open wheel (single-seaters, like Formula 3 cars), tuner (fast, powerful beasts of the road), street (a lot of the cars you see on a daily basis in real life – and the McLaren F1) and endurance (your *GT3*/*Le Mans*-style motors) make up the numbers in what is an initially bewildering array of disciplines, styles of racing and car physics to master.

It feels like tremendous value and a reaction to the complaints aimed at *Grid 2* – namely that it wasn't as 'pure' a racing game as the original *Race Driver: Grid*. It's not unfair to look at things that way, either, with the variety of race styles accompanied by more realistic handling – though still not ultra-sim style – and the much-hyped return of the in-car view. Though this latter part has, much to the consternation of series fans, seen a reduction in its detail from the first game.

Each of the aforementioned disciplines feels as well made as the other, with no dead wood and only personal preference coming into picking out the best ones. Some will be furious at having to make their way through drift events in the tuner section, while others will find the rough and ready shunting of the touring races irritating in the extreme. Especially when you get nudged out on a corner *again*. But none of it feels half-baked, and each speciality requires a palpable difference in

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS3
OTHER FORMATS: XBOX 360, PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Codemasters
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-12
ONLINE REVIEWED: No

CODEMASTERS HAS GUTTED THE EXPERIENCE OF ITS REAL DEPTH, LEAVING A RATHER HOLLOW – IF ENJOYABLE – EXPERIENCE

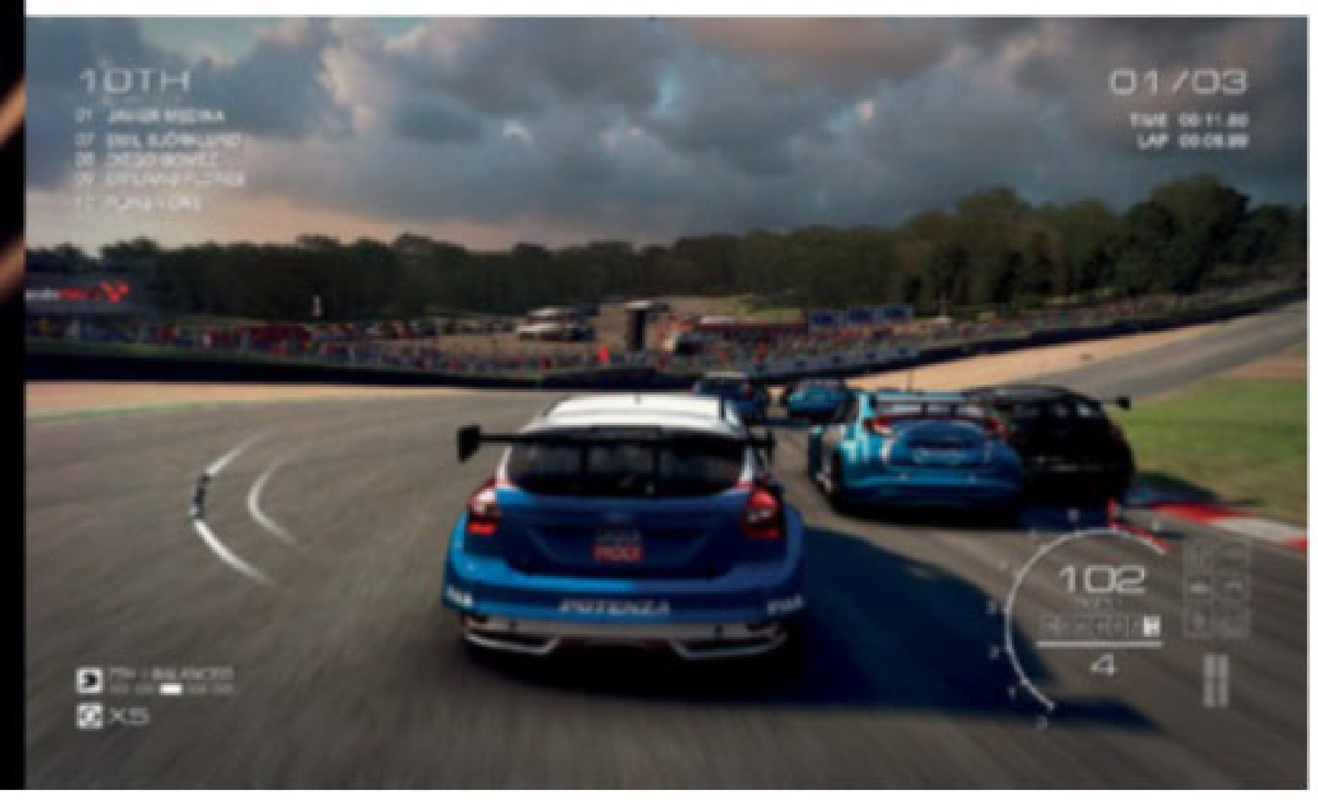
FAQs

Q. HOW MANY TRACKS?
22, though different configurations and routes brings it up to around 100 variations. Enough, in other words.

Q. AND HOW MANY CARS?
78 in total, though it's fair to expect more will arrive via future DLC packs.

Q. CAR DAMAGE?
Full, and very satisfying. At least when you're not on the receiving end of it.



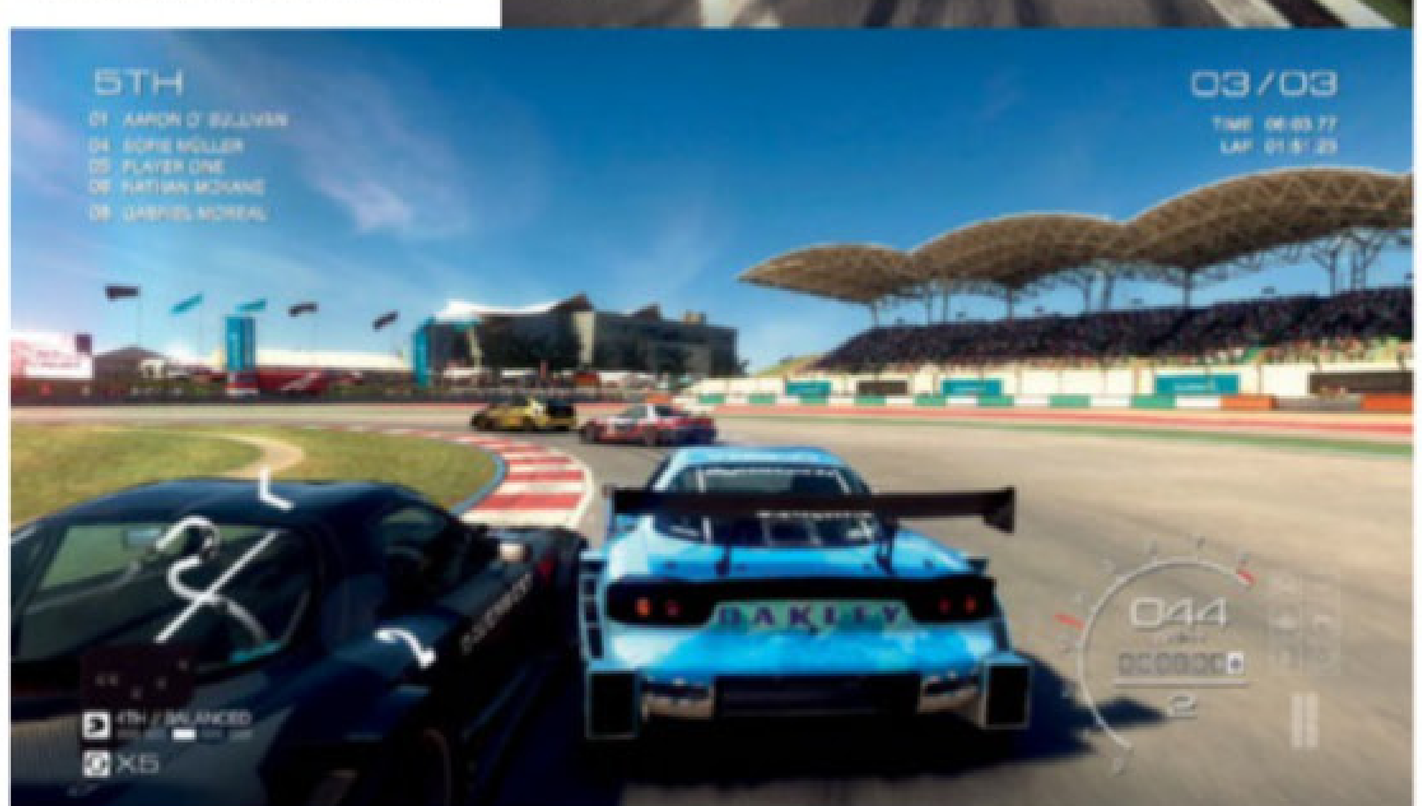


Left: The return of the in-car view had fans delighted, but it's a blurry, cut-back version compared to the glory days of the original.



Right: Rival AI is very good for the most part – very believable, non-robotic behaviour.

Below: Tracks are a mixture of real life and fictional ones. None of them feel out of place in any way, and offer a nice mix of places on which to burn rubber.





how you actually play it. All of *Grid Autosport* feels eminently scaleable, with custom difficulty levels and car tuning available for each race. Even those struggling after a fair few races can fiddle to find the perfect balance between challenge and fun – it's a praiseworthy approach from Codemasters and one that feels utterly refreshing in the face of something like *Gran Turismo 6*, where you simply upgrade a car and end up lapping everyone twice.

But there is a distinct feeling of emptiness about the whole experience. This pared-back approach, reining it in from the bombast of *Grid 2*, has had a bit too much stripped away. All there is to the game is racing, with nothing really pushing you to keep going – no persistent teams, no choice of teammates, no story – vague or otherwise – pushing you through. You pick a racing discipline, pick a team and race a few times, then start again in the next season. A lack of persistence feels like a lack of permanence, and a lack of permanence lends itself to the feeling that… well, you're not actually *doing* anything yourself.

You don't build up a garage of hard-won cars, you don't see yourself rise from the bottom to the top, you don't have rivalries that last through the seasons – you're just a gun for hire; a mercenary driver taking on the most enticing contract from anyone who comes knocking.

Of course, that won't matter to those who do just want a racing experience. It might even come as good news to those who derided *Grid 2*'s more 'welcoming' approach. But it does feel as though Codemasters has gutted the experience of its real depth, leaving a rather hollow – if enjoyable – experience in its wake.

This alongside the fact that you have to play the game for hours before reaching the requisite level three in each discipline to unlock the first *Grid* championship just doesn't lend itself to a game that you will want to persist with. It's good, it's fun and it's very well made (as well as exquisitely pretty in places), but *Autosport* just isn't meaty enough to justify the amount of time it asks of you. Even with some customisation offered in the realms of online, the whole package still feels like a selection of disparate parts with no real core holding it all together.

The original *Race Driver: Grid* was a kick up the backside in the subsection of a genre that seriously needed it. It brought a fine balance between dry simulation and the all-out thrills of gaming, and even now, six years later, it's still fantastic fun (even if it no longer has online play). *Grid Autosport* is good fun too, and a technological leap over its forebear, but we can't see anyone extolling its virtues in six years time. They'll say it was a lark, but they'll not really remember why, and they'll carry on playing whatever it is Codemasters does next in the series – because whatever that is will be the *true* sequel fans wanted. For now, though, and for the right price, *Autosport* can bridge the gap.

SYNTHESIS
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

STACKING DISCIPLINE: It's not genres per se, but *Autosport*'s bringing together of different racing disciplines – a la the original game – is a great feature, bringing longevity to the experience.



GETTING TYRED

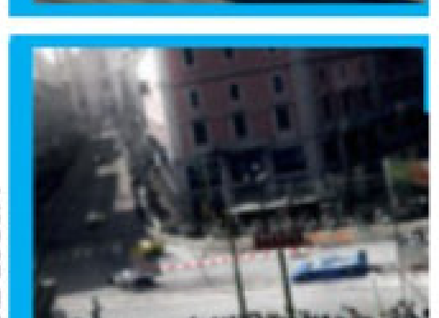
It's utterly bewildering, for all *Grid Autosport* does right, to find there are no pit stops in the game. In most races it isn't an issue worth highlighting, but in the longer endurance category races it really is a decision that has to be questioned. You can be 95% of the way through an extended race only to suffer a puncture on your tyre. You're out of rewinding flashbacks? Tough. You either scrape through on spark-flinging metal at a quarter of your top speed, almost immediately ending up at the back of the pack, or you restart the entire race.

BETTER THAN

GRID 2



WORSE THAN



RACE DRIVER: GRID

VERDICT 7/10
MANY WHEELS DON'T MAKE A REVOLUTION, IT SEEMS.

HALF-COCKED AND FIRING BLANKS

Sniper Elite III

To a certain breed of FPS enthusiast, Nazi footsoldiers are the crème de la crème of NPC aggressors. Whenever too many shooters plant their narrative feet in either the present day or the not-too-distant future, it isn't too difficult to find small pockets of fanatics lobbying online for an imminent return to the Forties. Nazis are the ultimate unambiguous enemy; history's quintessential villains. And this might explain how *Sniper Elite III* manages to get away with scenes of violence which are nothing less than flagrantly, aggressively pornographic.

In its predecessor, executing a needlepoint headshot caused bones to splinter and organs to rupture in slow-motion X-ray vision; in this instalment, organs burst and facial cartilage literally explodes into hundreds of pieces. The dull, liquefied squelch noises on the soundtrack are now enhanced with panicked gargling (if you penetrate the neck, naturally) and you're also encouraged – primarily via achievements and trophies – to go for the groin whenever possible. These X-ray sequences look like they have been crafted expressly to appear in the background during a *Daily Mail* ban-all-videogames-now panel, so it's odd to concur with the one word that most series devotees tend to use to describe *Sniper Elite*: it's fun.

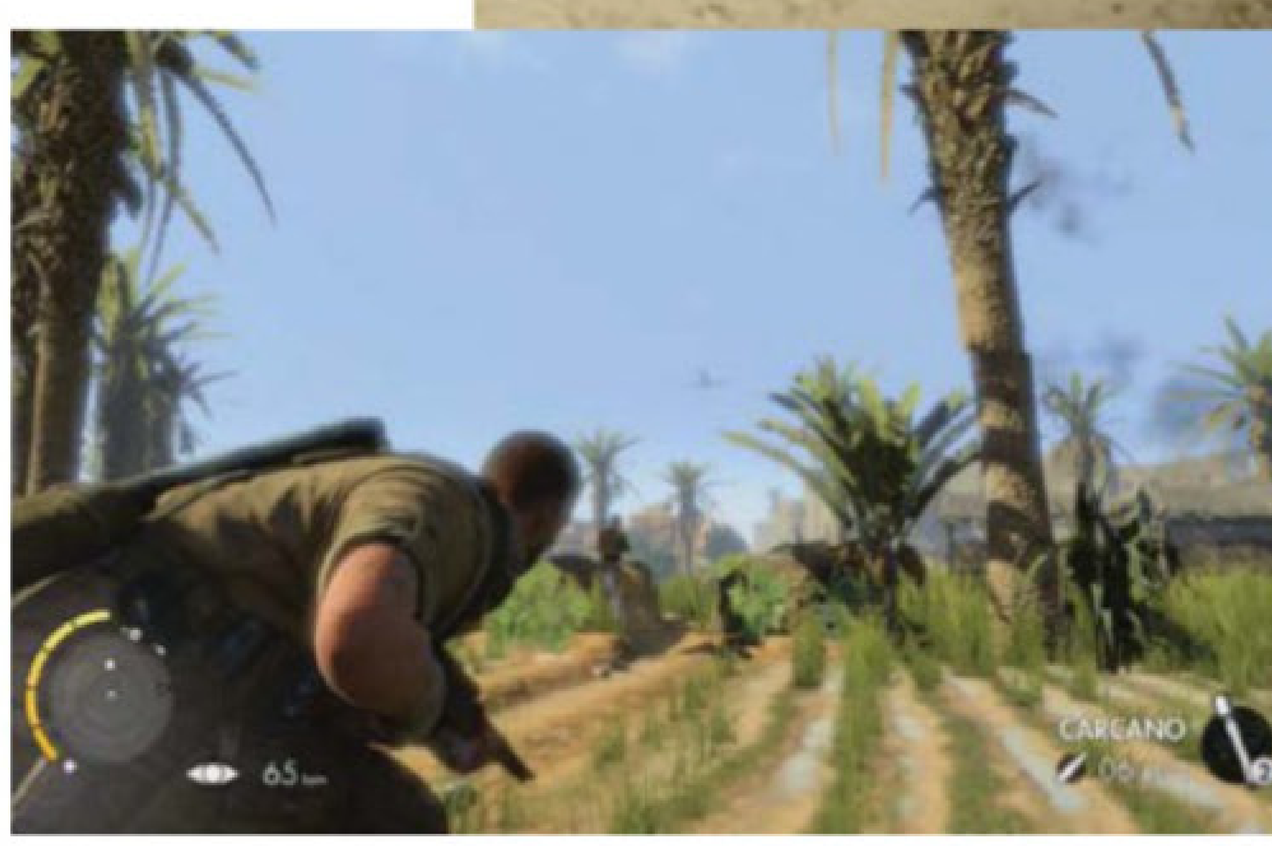
At least, it's fun up to a point. *Sniper Elite* has always been a slightly deceitful series; a mid-budget smash and grab operation masquerading as a multi-team blockbuster. Rebellion would like everyone to believe that *Sniper Elite* is essentially a *Call Of Duty* offshoot, but the scrappy production values and general lack of scope occasionally make it feel like the port of an iOS romp. The wide expanse of the African plains obviously invites more tactical opportunities than were offered by the claustrophobic back streets of Berlin, but for the most part the game's "open" world is entirely illusory; you're still being guided

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
OTHER FORMATS: Xbox One, Playstation 3, PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Rebellion
DEVELOPER: 505 Games
PRICE: £49.99/£39.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-12
ONLINE REVIEWED: YES



Right: Do you remember that deeply irritating thing that old games used to do, when NPCs didn't move a single muscle until you'd lined up the perfect headshot? Yeah, that.





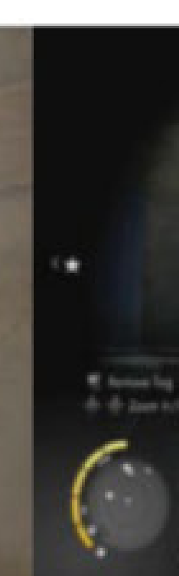
FAQs

Q. CAN YOU MASK YOUR GUNFIRE?
You can still use background noise to cover your shots, yes. However, that only works fifty percent of the time.

Q. ARE THERE MACHINE GUNS? PISTOLS?
Sadly, yes. They reload slowly and spray bullets to put you off, even though you sometimes *have* to use them.

Q. IS THERE CO-OP?
In addition to solid mini-modes like Overwatch, you can play the whole campaign in co-op.





TO DISCUSS SNIPER ELITE III IS TO PROCESS A PROTRACTED SHOPPING LIST OF INTEGRAL CRACKS AND PROBLEMS







Left: Dramatic music still plays until you've taken care of every last enemy in each environment; annoyingly removing every ounce of suspense.



Left: The game's world is so lacking in interactivity that you can't help but wonder why it wasn't set in outer space. You can massacre an entire platoon, and the corpses' superiors will often continue to patrol the area as if nothing has happened.



along your travels by invisible walls and restrictive scenery. There are a few levels in which you can choose your own path, but you're only ever choosing between a couple of rigid, preset routes.

That said, the environments are generally larger and the enemies far, far more plentiful than they have been previously. If you're determined to play through the entire campaign stealthily, tagging enemies on your mini-map is now utterly essential. Another credit to this second sequel – and a distinct improvement over its predecessor – is that the AI is prone to some genuinely unpredictable behaviour. You only possess a finite number of NPC tags, but if you don't tag pretty much every enemy that you come across (before taking them out one at a time) they are liable to creep up on you completely unannounced.

This unpredictability is capable of creating the odd thrilling moment, but it is unappetisingly brutal with it. When you've carefully (and quietly) dispatched every enemy in a large area, only to be shot in the back at the last moment by a soldier cowering silently in a corner, it feels like you're being slapped on the wrists for a mistake that you had no choice but to make. And you certainly aren't getting that half hour back.

And if *Sniper Elite III* has one fundamental problem, it is that it can't help but consistently waste your time; through sloppy design, antiquated bugs or its general lack of polish. You can't perform stealth takedowns if your quarry is standing in front of a knee-high wall. If you want to check the trajectory of a potential grenade, the only way to cancel the throw is to fall off some scenery. Nearby voices (complete with subtitles) play on the soundtrack even after you've killed everyone, forcing you to slowly creep towards a checkpoint when you could have been sprinting. And it's wholly possible to see an entire building vanish in front of your eyes, leaving you to snipe at Nazi officers kneeling sheepishly in mid-air, fifty feet above you.

But the absurdly fine-tuned gunplay offers such a rousing (if guilty) high that's more than enough to propel you through the game's opening two hours; you brutalise your way through the campaign's opening stretch high on a sugar rush of pure wrongness. Once that novelty has worn off, though, you're left to deal with a niggling heap of technical shortcomings. And while the aesthetic kinks are easy to turn a blind eye to, there are simply far too many bugs here that absolutely hinder your ability to enjoy the game. Botching a headshot because bullets are apparently incapable of penetrating African greenery is one thing. But when you're unable to complete a section because the vehicle that you need to destroy has literally driven outside of the game, you know that your leisure time would probably be better spent elsewhere. To add insult to injury, the auto-save mechanic is so thoroughly frazzled that you can lose up to an hour's worth of progress at certain junctures. Thankfully there is a manual save system too, and it's wise to utilise it as often as possible.

To discuss *Sniper Elite III* is to process a protracted shopping list of integral cracks and problems. The actual sniper gunplay remains taut and astutely refined, but you're still required to engage in periodic battles with your other weapons, which (as before) is when the game really falls flat. The first great sniper-themed shooter still hasn't arrived. *Sniper Elite V2* came far closer to taking that trophy than most, but this sequel takes a few sizable steps in the wrong direction; and only because its creators wanted to make you think that it was a mega-budget blockbuster when it categorically isn't. Shame.

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

AUDIO CONSISTENCY: You can move from crouching to standing and someone in the distance will hear, yet you can slowly shoot a yelling man to death and the man next door won't bat an eyelid.

VERDICT 4/10

A NEARLY ENJOYABLE, NEARLY COHERENT MISFIRE





ONLINE POOR FARE

Sniper Elite V2's enjoyable co-op modes (including the novel Overwatch) return here, although once again without any kind of matchmaking system. It's a strange oversight when you consider that there's matchmaking in competitive multiplayer, but – during launch week, at least – searching for a game will often just create a dead lobby for you that nobody else can join. When you do get into a match, you'll realise that success depends on having both a teammate and patience. As action games go it's definitely unusual, but problems are almost always solved with a shotgun blast to the back rather than a meticulous snipe. A thoroughly decent Horde variant rounds out the package.



Above: This explosion comes from one of the railguns developed by the UN to destroy meteor fragments. They cause havoc for anything in the air.

YOU'RE MY EYES, GOOSE

Ace Combat Infinity

We tried our very best *not* to enter the danger zone. As closet Kenny Loggins fans we're very much part of a seedy underworld forsaken by modern society, and yet at the first whiff of a *Top Gun*-worthy dogfight, we'd begun the inexorable journey towards becoming motorbike-riding, aviator-wearing, flight safety-flouting Maverick – only with a slightly smaller chip on our shoulder. Still, there are worse places to be than the danger zone, and *Ace Combat Infinity* whole-heartedly embraces the fly-boy silliness of Tony Scott's orange-filtered, volleyball-playing flyathon, albeit with a boorish, military gaze that belies the ludicrous fun inherent to the genre.

Infinity marks the series' move into free-to-play territory – an unforeseen transition but one that attempts to freshen up the formula. Bandai Namco is one of a few publishers that seems to do F2P fairly well, with notable examples being *Tekken Revolution* and the cut-down version of *Dead Or Alive 5*. There is neither the breadth of *World Of Tanks*, nor the technical heft of *PlanetSide 2*, but as a game that rewards repeat play without forcing players to fork out real cash, it's notable in its achievement. In fact, when soaring (or plummeting) through online co-op missions, research progression moves a lot faster than in other free-to-play titles – *World Of Tanks* and *World Of Warplanes* can be really stingy bastards when it comes to XP – and rewards repeat play.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation 3
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Bandai Namco
DEVELOPER: Project Aces
PRICE: Free (with microtransactions)
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1-8
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

EACH CAMPAIGN MISSION THAT YOU EMBARK ON INTRODUCES NEW ENEMY GROUND DEFENCES

Challenge lists serve to augment the experience points that you earn, and actually make progressing through the research tree something of a joy rather than the fun-sapping money/time abyss that it usually is. These can consist of a variety of things, ranging from embarking on a certain amount of missions within a particular time frame to shooting down a huge amount of enemy aircraft, and reward the player with multiple gifts, such as extra fuel reserves (that allow extended play) and even experimental aircraft for a limited amount of time. It's not the most original of setups, but it works.

What doesn't work quite as well is the limited single-player campaign. As aforementioned, it's pretty dry and largely throwaway, and the plot is quite preposterous. There are only five single-player missions available at the time of

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY PLANES ARE THERE?

There are in excess of 20 aircraft to unlock, either through traditional research or completing special challenges.

Q. DO I NEED TO BE ONLINE?

Even playing the single-player campaign requires you to be online unfortunately, so you had better make sure you have a good connection.

Q. ANY COMBAT TIPS?

Remain aware of your surroundings at all times and avoid target fixation – tailing one enemy for too long will leave you vulnerable to attack.





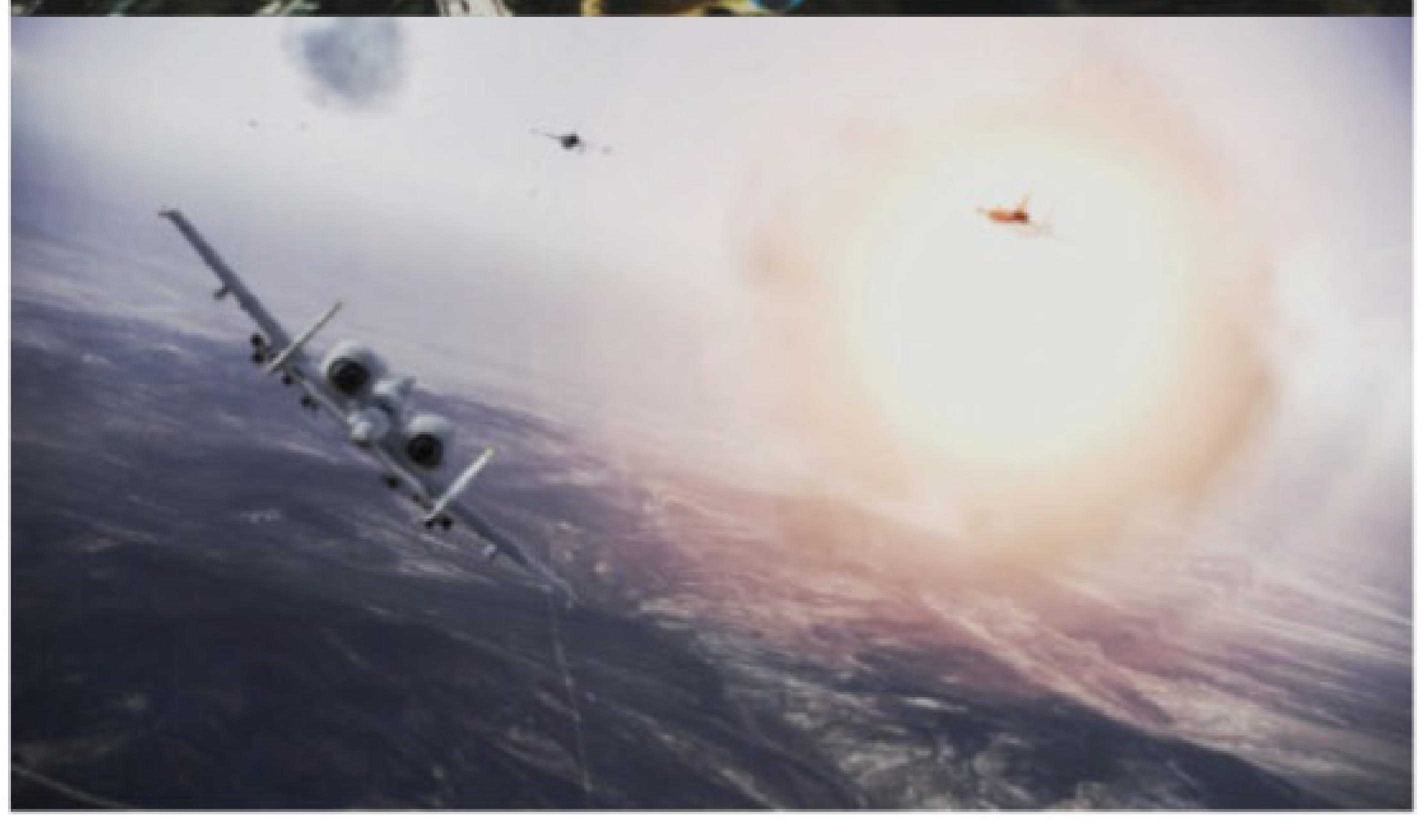
Below: Cockpit view is exactly how every flying game should be played. It's so much more immersive and ramps up the challenge as you have to physically use the right stick to look around.



Right: UAVs are slippery little buggers, and require some lightning-fast reactions to down.



Below: Although the game's graphical output isn't quite *InFamous: Second Son*, the cityscapes look cool, especially when you shoot past them at 1,400mph.



writing, but this number is expected to increase over the coming months. The campaign itself takes place in an alternate-reality 21st Century, one in which deadly meteor storms battered Earth and necessitated the invention of enormous railguns with which to shoot said meteors out of the sky… apparently. It's all a bit hazy after that, as the plot suffers under the weight of the customary shouting and wobbly Americanisms that come hand-in-hand with military-based games nowadays. The writing suffers a little from being part of a Japanese production as well, as the limited script that is in place hasn't held up too well under the translation process and will pass over the heads of most players.

It's a bit of a shame, as the missions themselves are quite fun. Sure, there are a variety of other pilots with rubbish Nineties callsigns that kids would invent like Slash and Viper (your callsign is Reaper), but there's a fair amount of variety throughout the single-player campaign and the easy early missions soon make way for some proper carnage that will test your abilities. Well, to an extent anyway.

It all seems as if the campaign merely serves as an elongated tutorial for the online co-op missions that are *Ace Combat Infinity*'s bread and butter. Each campaign mission that you embark on introduces new enemy ground defences like SAM turrets and tanks, as well as pitting you against armed UAVs and enemy attack aircraft. All of this enemy ordnance soon becomes commonplace in the score attack-style co-op missions, in which you join a team with three other intrepid aviators to take on another team of four to try and eradicate more enemy emplacements than them. Progress is marked by a bar at the top of the screen and ongoing score counters, and points are awarded in different amounts depending on the target that you destroy – for example, downing an enemy fighter jet will proffer you more points than divebombing a defenceless APC on the ground.

Speaking of points, however, it does seem that so far the developer and publisher have missed the point of a flight sim, as at present there is no PvP option available in the game. It's all well and good shooting AI targets with fairly predictable patterns – it's worth mentioning here that eliminating ground targets with heatseeking air-to-ground missiles is *so* bloody easy – but nothing will compare to the thrill of shooting down other human players, something that was present at launch for *World Of Warplanes* and *War Thunder*. Hopefully this will be made available in a later update, but for now, without PvP *Ace Combat Infinity* is just a bit, well, boring really.

That's not to say that it can't be a rewarding experience at times; after all, the gameplay holds up pretty well (if a little basic) and each jet feels fast and powerful. It's nothing special to look at, but it still represents another free-to-play game that is worth the space on your hard drive, if only to give it a quick bash and then set it aside. It's a little dull – particularly without PvP – but shouting "danger zone" at the top of your lungs will no doubt alleviate some of the mundanity.

WORLDWIDE

TAKING GAMING ONLINE

ALWAYS AND FOREVER – Online play currently revolves around four-versus-four score attack missions, with some reactive objectives that appear occasionally. However, even when playing the single-player campaign a persistent connection is required.

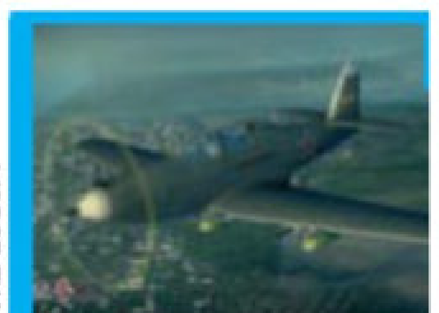
MISSILE MADNESS

Each aircraft has a multitude of different enhancements that can be unlocked as you progress through online co-op missions. These cover things from enhanced flying suits to AGMs and the particularly handy AAMs. These can then be used with your aircraft of choice – provided you have researched and unlocked it – to aid you when you take to the skies. There are different classes of aircraft available that benefit from different combinations of enhancements, such as a ground attack fighter like the A-10 benefiting from a loadout of earth-bringing heatseeking AGMs.

BETTER THAN: TOM CLANCY'S HAWX 2



WORSE THAN: WAR THUNDER



VERDICT 6/10

WORTH THE DISK SPACE, BUT NOTHING INCENDIARY

IFFY SHADES OF GREY

Monochroma

DETAILS

FORMAT: Mac
OTHER FORMATS: PC, Wii U, PS4 (release date TBC)
ORIGIN: Turkey
PUBLISHER: Nowhere Studios
DEVELOPER: In-House
PRICE: £14.99
RELEASE: OUT NOW
PLAYERS: 1
PLAYERS: OS: Windows XP, Processor: 2 GHz or better, Memory: 2 GB RAM, Graphics: Shader Model 3.0 Support, DirectX: Version 9.0, Hard Drive: 4GB available space
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN

DAYLIGHT



WORSE THAN



LIMBO

Some games take inspiration from others, often in homage to something great. Inspiration is supposed to drive creativity, to improve and expand on an already established idea. Unfortunately, that's where *Monochroma* fails. It simply doesn't stretch beyond already fashionable video game tropes. If you couldn't tell from the images, the subject of the inspiration is *Limbo*, 2010's brilliant silhouetted platformer.

Like *Limbo*, there is a multitude of inevitable deaths waiting round the corner, but in *Monochroma* they lack the variety and spectacle of *Limbo*'s gruesome encounters. Dying is not a perversely satisfying event, and given its frequency, you'll be thankful for the forgiving checkpoints throughout. The main cause of these deaths lies in the awkward controls. Jumping is a floaty and imprecise affair, as your character meanders across the landscape with all the grace of a flailing puppet. Progress was not once halted due to a tricky or inventive puzzle, but when trying to perform basic jumps.

To further the frustration, the game centres around escorting your injured brother to safety. Your sibling weighs you down, reducing your agility, and is scared of the dark, so can only be placed in well-lit areas. Frankly, he's a bit of a pain, and apart from an initial brief hug, there is little emotional connection between them. When he is away from your protection, the panic is surprisingly poignant, but only because failure becomes much more likely, and the thought of facing the whole sequence again fills you with dread.

Potentially, *Monochroma*'s presentation is its saving grace, but it's not pleasurable to navigate the bland world. The greyscale is complemented by selective red colour, causing some objects to stand out, such as the goggles of your younger brother or a tractor. It's an explicit attempt to be visually striking, but along with the shapeless character models, it ends up kind of dull. The music is enjoyable when it's there, but it's all too brief and most of the game is spent in a silence that mirrors the colour palette.

It's unfortunate, because *Monochroma* is not an intrinsically unlikeable game. It's aspiring to be a thought-provoking and atmospheric platformer, and that's to be commended. In truth, it's an average game, with the music and the presentation proposing a more dramatic and meaningful experience than is actually manifested in the gameplay. It ends up blending its inspirations into an indie greatest hits, except without the necessary greatness.

MISSING LINK

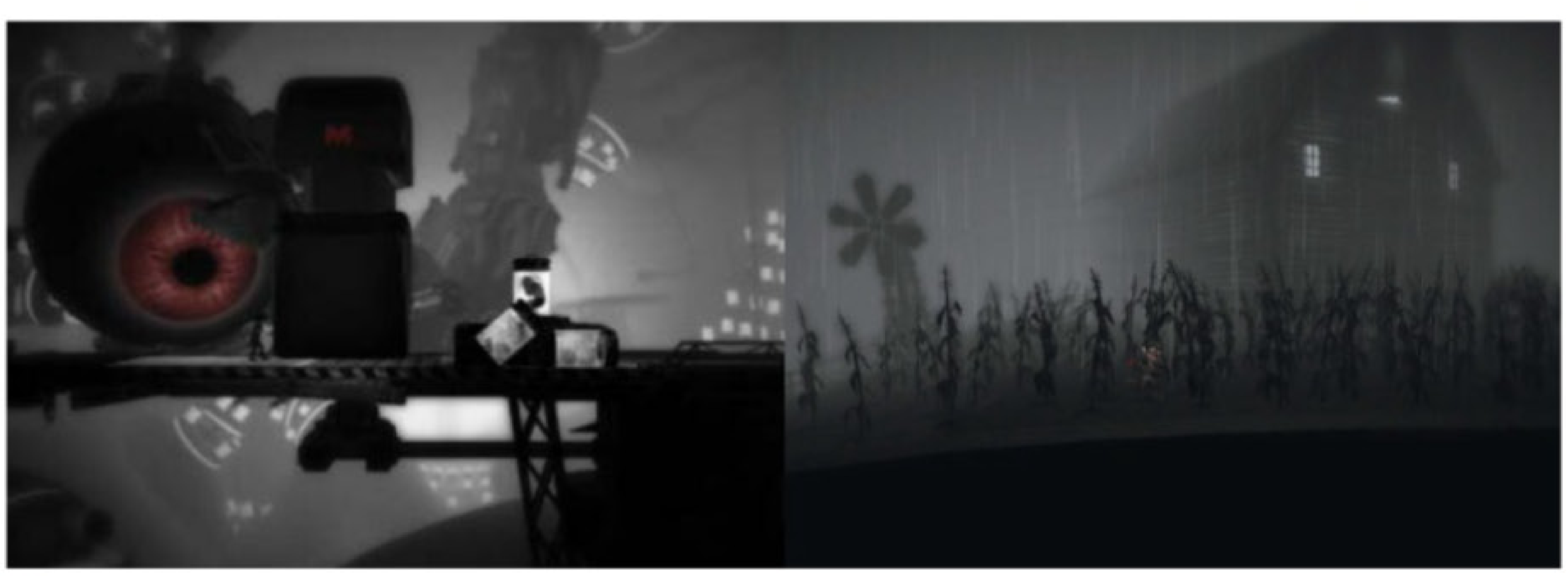
WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

BROTHERLY LOVE: We'd love more emotional expression from the main protagonists. There are plenty of games that have succeeded in this without the use of dialogue, proving that sentiment can still be achieved with a minimalist tone.



Above: The lighting can actually make the game harder to enjoy. Sometimes entire screens are submitted to a dank, dark vagueness, which is a shame, given that some of the busier locations are interesting to explore.





Above: The art style isn't distinct enough to make the two-toned presentation that striking, and rare moments of colour aren't used to great effect.

VERDICT 5/10
MORE INSIPID THAN INSPIRED

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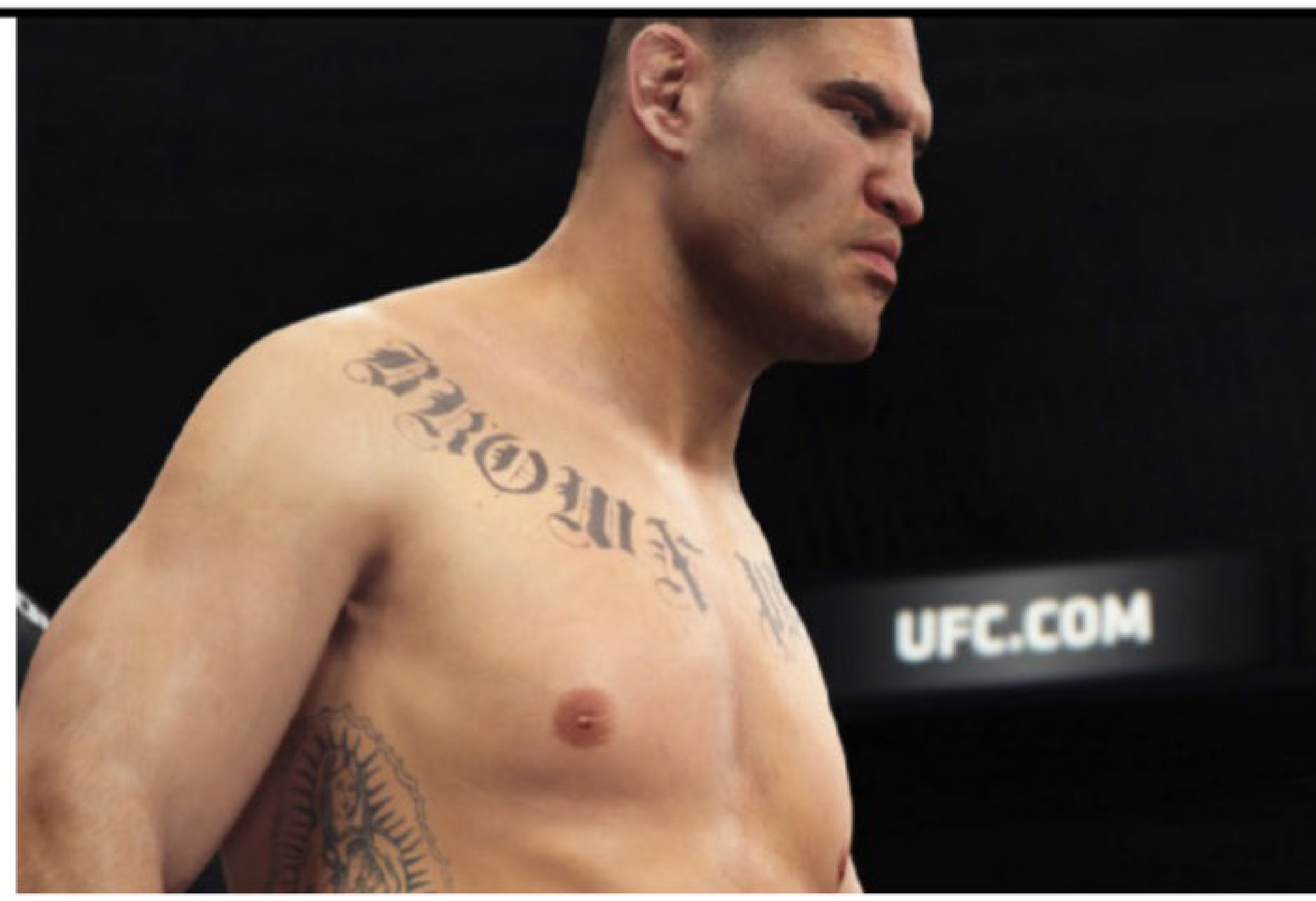
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THE ULTIMATE FIGHTER?

EA Sports UFC





Above: Character models are stunning in their accuracy, with everything from a fighter's face to their torso accurately re-created. The more famous fighters, such as Jon Jones and Cain Velasquez, feature animations that make them move exactly like their real-life counterparts.

EA Sports *UFC* is a game of three parts. Just like in a real UFC fight, you'll have to master ground, clinch and stand-up portions in order to become well-rounded enough to compete for a championship belt. The fact that these three elements feel so different from one another is both the game's knockout blow and its Achilles heel, at once engaging and frustrating.

The positive of this is that each of the game's fighters feel like fans of the sport would expect. Demetrius Johnson excels in the stand-up game, able to fly around the ring with his trademark energy to keep the pressure on his opponent. Conversely, Chael Sonnen positively labours when on his feet and it's only when he's on the ground that his skills come into devastating effect.

By having these positions play and feel so independent, EA Canada manages to instil personality into the roster. Essentially, attack in line with your fighter's strengths or get knocked out. There's no doubt that the *UFC* faithful will feel a certain sense of loving inclusion at the fact that knowing a fighter's skills aids performance, but everyone else might initially feel a little lost.

The downside of the tri-vector approach is that things can seem disjointed. It's all very well having three working parts, but they must be connected in a way that feels fluid. Moving from stand-up to the ground, for instance, never seems as natural as it does when watching a UFC event live. As with THQ's defunct *UFC Undisputed* series, you must use the right stick to take your adversary to the canvass – a strict mechanic that prevents fighters from ever stumbling accidentally to the ground, or taking lightning fast advantage of a mistimed punch or kick.

This transitioning between positions feels robotic, general failing to replicate the precision and adaptability of the fighters. It's a shame, because the core elements work brilliantly. Boxing and kickboxing brings excitement and speed, wrestling is technical, rewarding those able to think a step ahead, while the mini-game during submissions is full of drama.

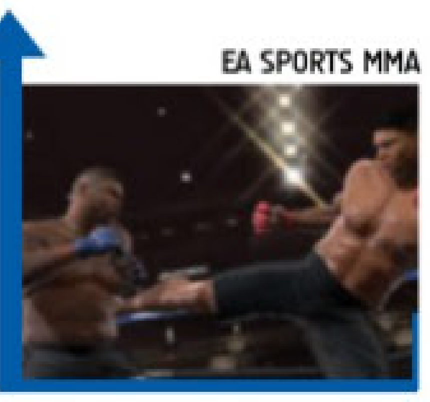
Said drama is heightened further when fighting human opposition, against whom you can play mind games, taunt and attempt to bluff through misdirection early in a fight, only to unpredictably change tactics later. The AI is credible and decent enough to make the main Career mode challenging, but it's a poor substitute. There's a good game at EA Sports *UFC's* core, it's just a shame that it's not as seamless in its delivery as we'd hoped it would be.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation 4
OTHER FORMATS: Xbox One
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: EA Sports
DEVELOPER: EA Canada
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: 20 June 2014 (US: 17 June 2014)
PLAYERS: 2
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

BETTER THAN

EA SPORTS MMA





UFC UNDISPUTED 3

WORSE THAN

FINGERPRINT

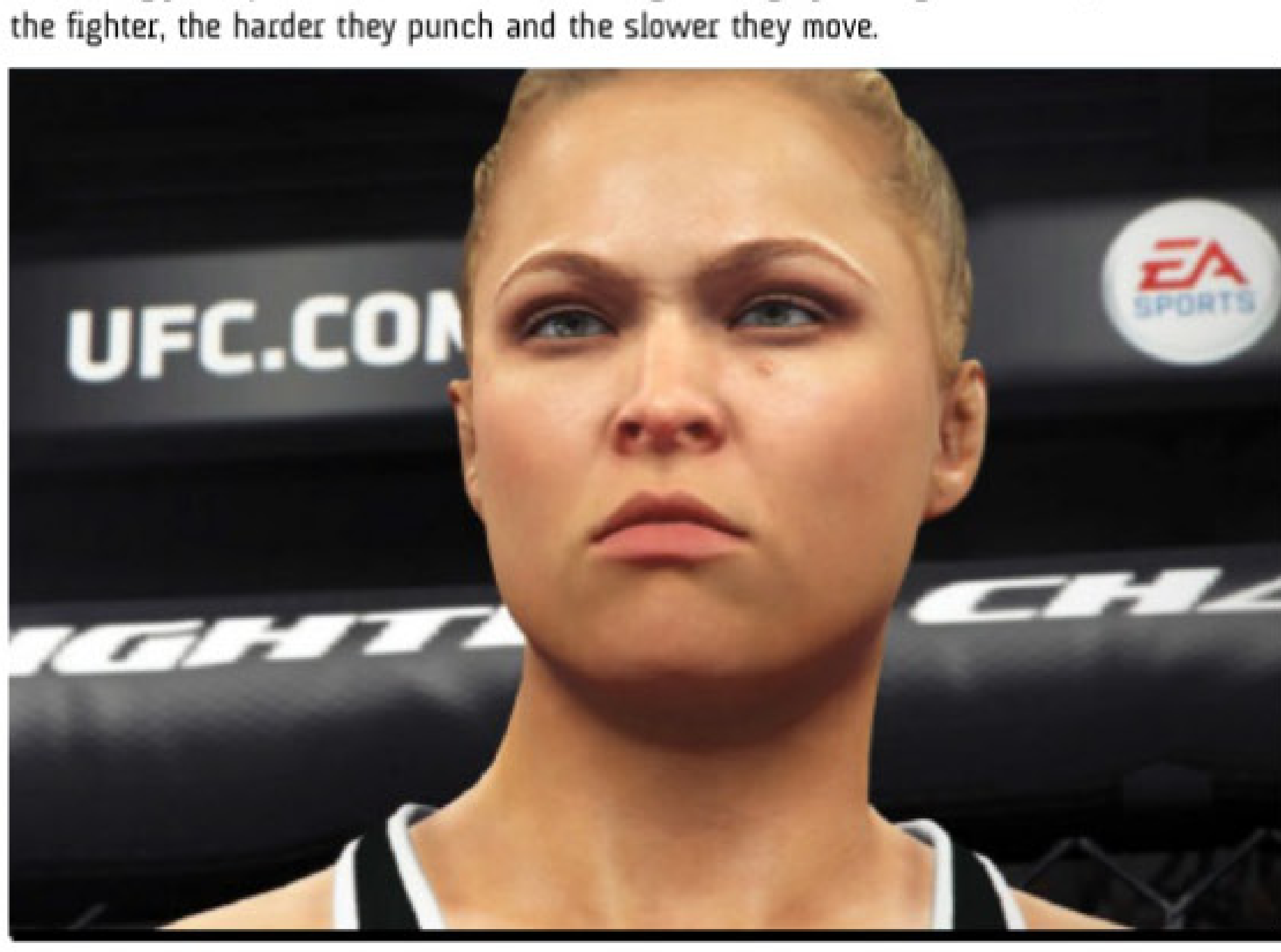
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

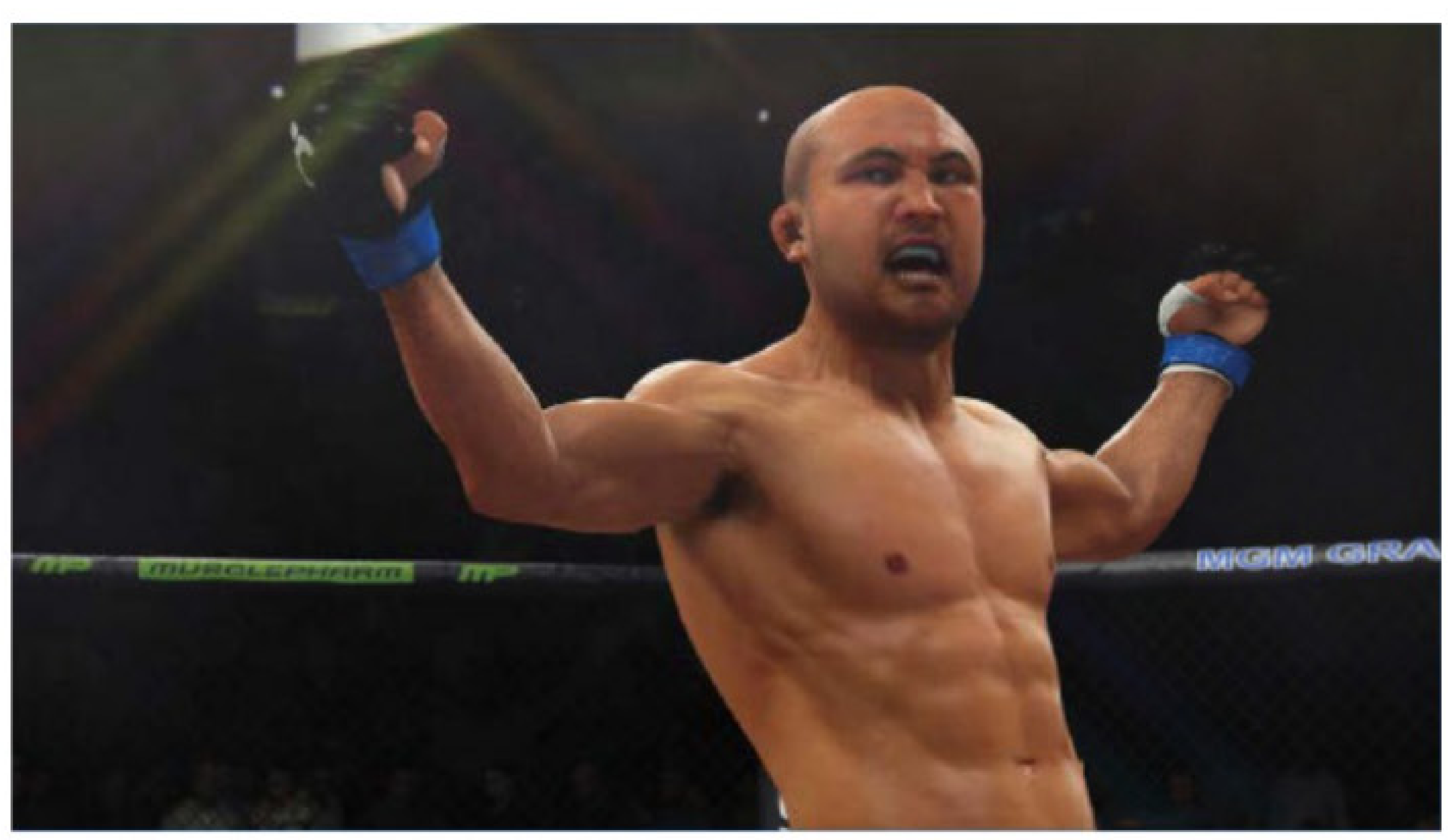
BRUCE LEE: Complete career on 'Pro' and you can play as the Little Phoenix. He comes with unique animations and attacks, but fighting with him is little different from similarly quick fighters.

VERDICT 7/10

MORE POLISH WOULD'VE MADE THIS GAME GREAT

Below: All of the UFC's weight divisions are present and correct, including the increasingly competitive woman's bantamweight category. As a general rule, the heavier the fighter, the harder they punch and the slower they move.





A TRIAL OF LOVE

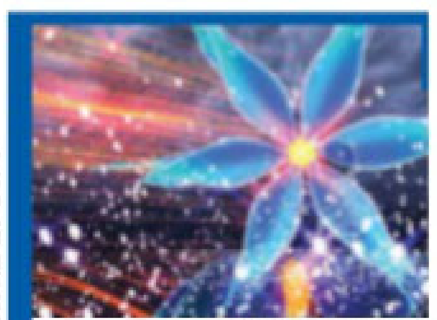
Entwined

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation 4
OTHER FORMATS: N/A
ORIGIN: USA
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: PixelOpus
PRICE: £6.49
RELEASE: 9 June 2014
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN — KUNG FU RIDER





WORSE THAN — CHILD OF EDEN

***Entwined* is a charming proposition, one that you can't help but respect and connect with upon first embarking on its unique attempt to tell a tale of love and companionship.** Newcomer PixelOpus has set out to craft a thought-provoking and artistic experience that'll sit comfortably alongside *Flower, Child Of Eden* and *Proteus* as something more than the sum of its polygonal parts.

It's a commendable goal, but one that *Entwined* falls to deliver upon. The underlying lore of a swan and a fish dedicating their lives to being with one another is reinforced by a crisp and colourful aesthetic, but it's the quality of the interactions that let it down. It takes roughly 90 minutes to complete the main mode, but after 20 you've seen everything.

On the left stick you control the fish, on the right the swan. You control these independently, steering each through their own set of wedges as they rush down a pre-defined tube. The speed picks up as levels progress, making it more difficult to accurately guide the two friends as you approach the end. It's impossible to fail, though – the level simply continuing until you've passed through enough wedges to fill up a green bar at the top of the screen.

Fill up the bar completely and fish and swan merge to form a green dragon, symbolising the strength of the connection they've developed as a result of navigating the level together. As the dragon you fly around an open environment at your leisure, collecting orbs to open the path to the next lifetime. Experience the turmoil of life, the bliss of true love, get reincarnated and repeat.

It's numbingly repetitive after the first couple of lifetimes. While new levels are mildly more difficult than the last, you by no means have to master wedge-hitting to succeed. That might be the point (you don't have to be perfect to win at love), but the fact remains that there's not enough variety to hold your interest for long. Frame-rate dips further spoil what is supposed to be a fluid, graceful affair.

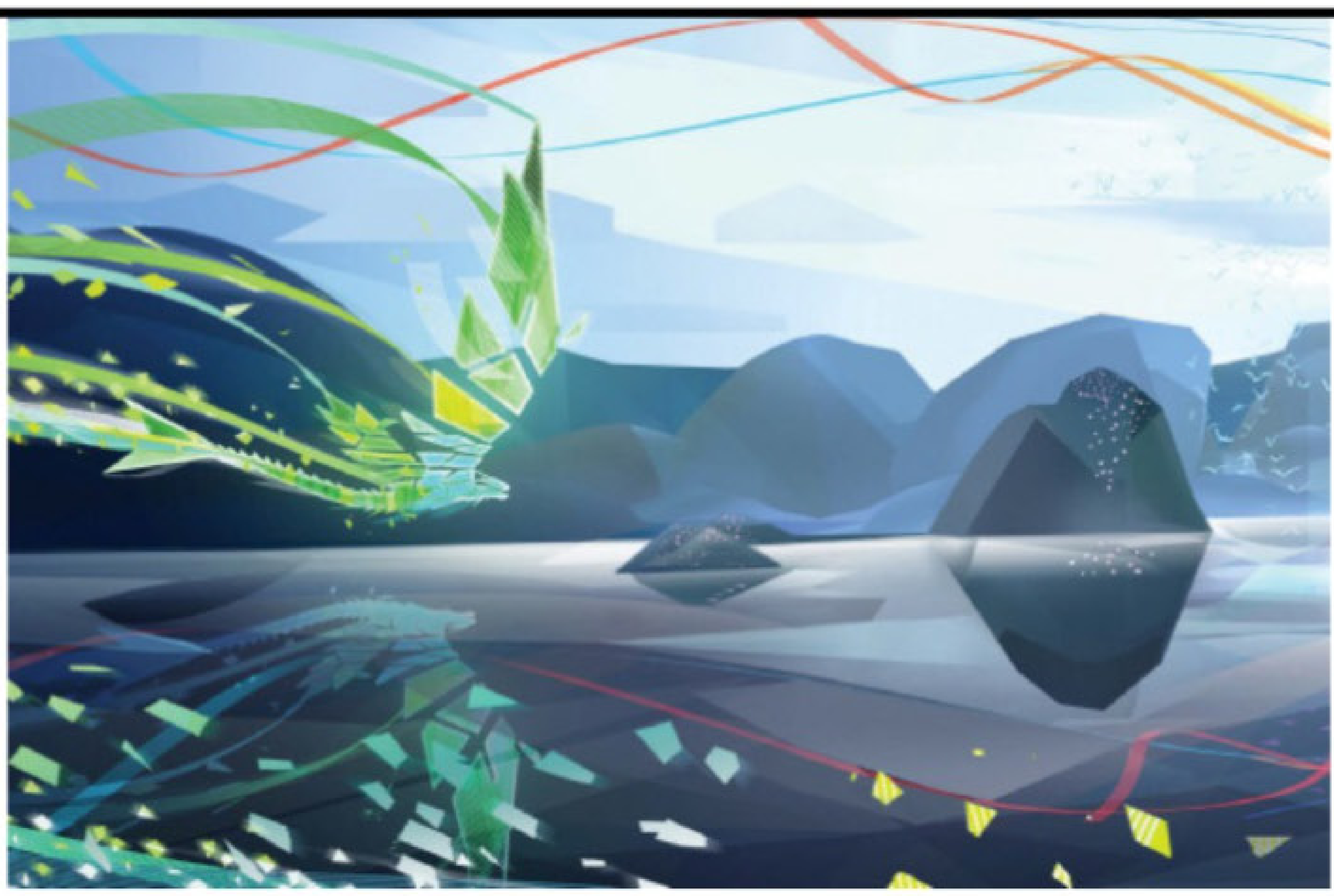
Challenge missions are available once the main game is complete, all of which significantly more difficult than what anything up to that point. The spike in difficulty is so severe that you'd be forgiven for thinking you're playing a different game. Not adequately preparing players is a cardinal design sin.

It's a shame that poor execution lets *Entwined* down. The themes being explored have the potential to be touching and are underrepresented in videogames. Hopefully PixelOpus can learn from its mistakes and deliver something that better blends its interactive elements.

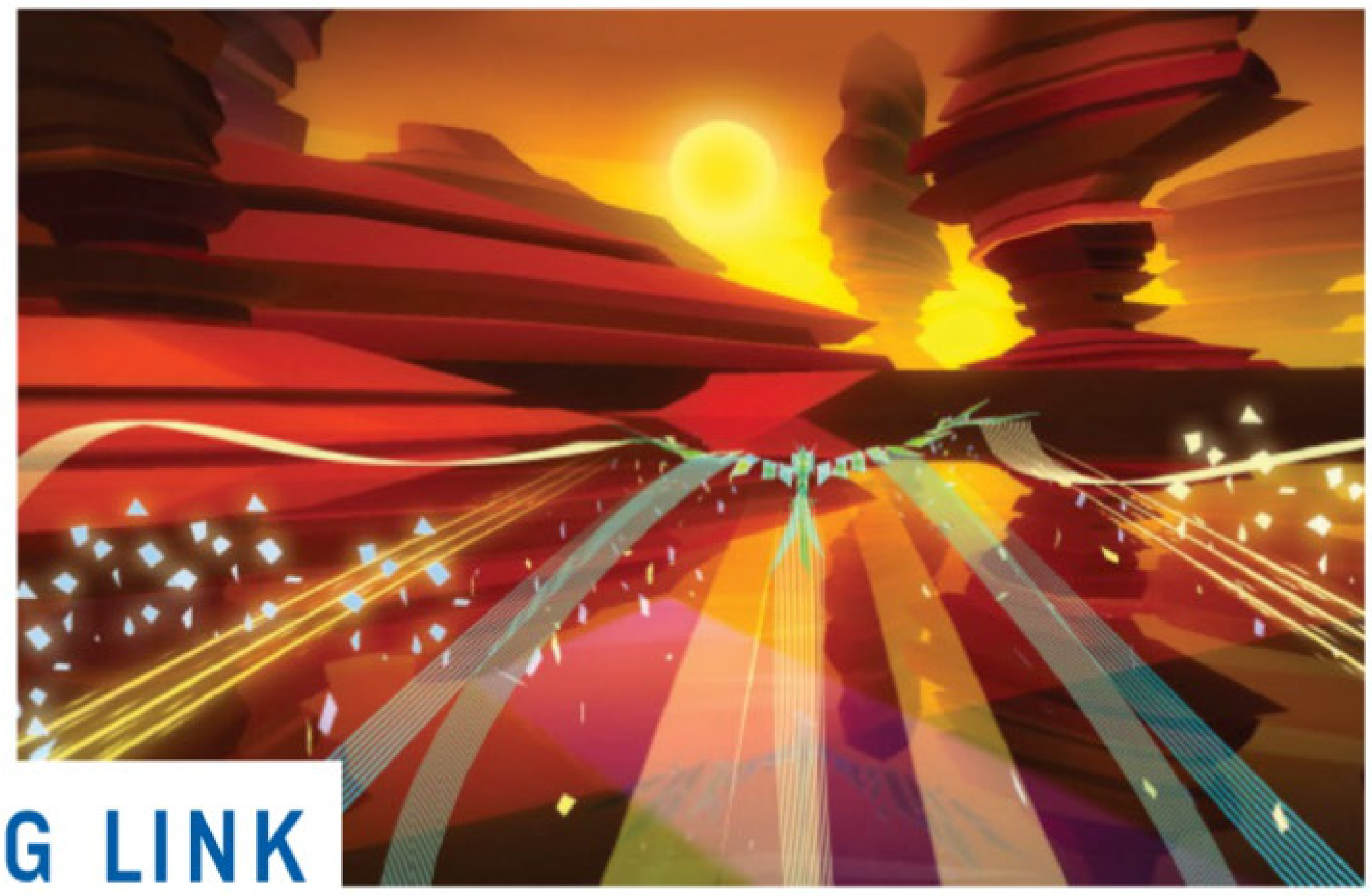
MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

PACING: The level of challenge needs better pacing. There's nothing wrong with having a difficult or easy game, but players must always know where they stand. Going from one extreme to the other results in frustration.



Above: Transforming into the dragon at the end of a level isn't the majestic event it's supposed to be. The screen awkwardly fades out and back in, revealing the dragon amid a hiccup-ridden smattering of neon lights.





Above: The variety is the most impressively executed part of *Entwined*, though it's not enough to warrant you playing it.

VERDICT 5/10

AN INTERESTING CONCEPT LET DOWN BY POOR DELIVERY





Left: Grinding is crucial to unlocking Sigils and Offerings, especially more potent ones. Still, at least you can take a few friends along for the ride and all try your luck together…

HELLO MY FRIEND, WE MEET AGAIN

Soul Sacrifice Delta

In an age when development costs are rising, studios and publishers are having to find creative ways of recouping costs. The HD-remake trend continues to prove pretty lucrative, especially with new consoles. After Capcom cunningly took inspiration from its own past by releasing upgraded 'G' versions of all of its insanely popular *Monster Hunter* franchise, pretty much every other co-op action RPG game has followed suit. It clearly works, as loyal fans won't flinch at the idea of buying the game twice, while newcomers can either dive in after the second media blast hits or pick up older versions on the cheap and be converted to the cause that way. But while some such 'Super' editions feel like cynical cash grabs, *Delta* is the opposite – in fact, it feels almost like a full sequel.

Mechanically, little has changed, but after Inafune's team nailed it first time out, this can only be a good thing. While *Monster Hunter* missions involve tracking and wearing down a beast over time, *Soul Sacrifice* takes a much more immediate approach – you're dumped in an arena with the quarry nearby and battle quickly ensues until one side dies. As in the original, six Offerings can be equipped, each with limited durability. Thanks to clever refinement of the game's execution mechanic, it's easier to keep these topped up – defeated enemies can be sacrificed, saved or have their destinies left to fate, each with a different benefit depending on which of the game's factions you align with.

The faction mechanic is superb, implemented brilliantly all the way from basic decisions about how to banish trash mobs up to a constant online power struggle between the three groups. After beating the original game's content, this aspect is taken even further with new story content and tons of extra bosses. There's also a Prestige mechanic, a random quest generator, a survival mode, better AI and online party stuff – probably close to twice the amount of content compared to the original.

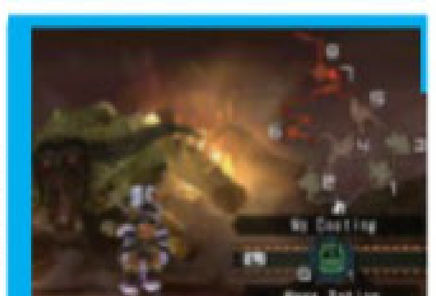
It's looking unlikely that we'll get a proper *Monster Hunter* game on Vita, but Delta is the best alternative on the platform right now. Art design and game design are excellent, meaning that all we want to do when confronted with even the most modest amount of downtime is bust out the Vita and throw giant exploding eggs at hideous giant creatures. Yes, we've done it before, but when so much effort has been put into improving an already great game, we're more than happy to pay for the privilege.

VERDICT 8/10
CAPCOM, YOU ARE BEING HUNTED

DETAILS
FORMAT: Vita
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Comcept/ MarvelousAQL
PRICE: £22.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-4
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

BETTER THAN
RAGNAROK ODYSSEY

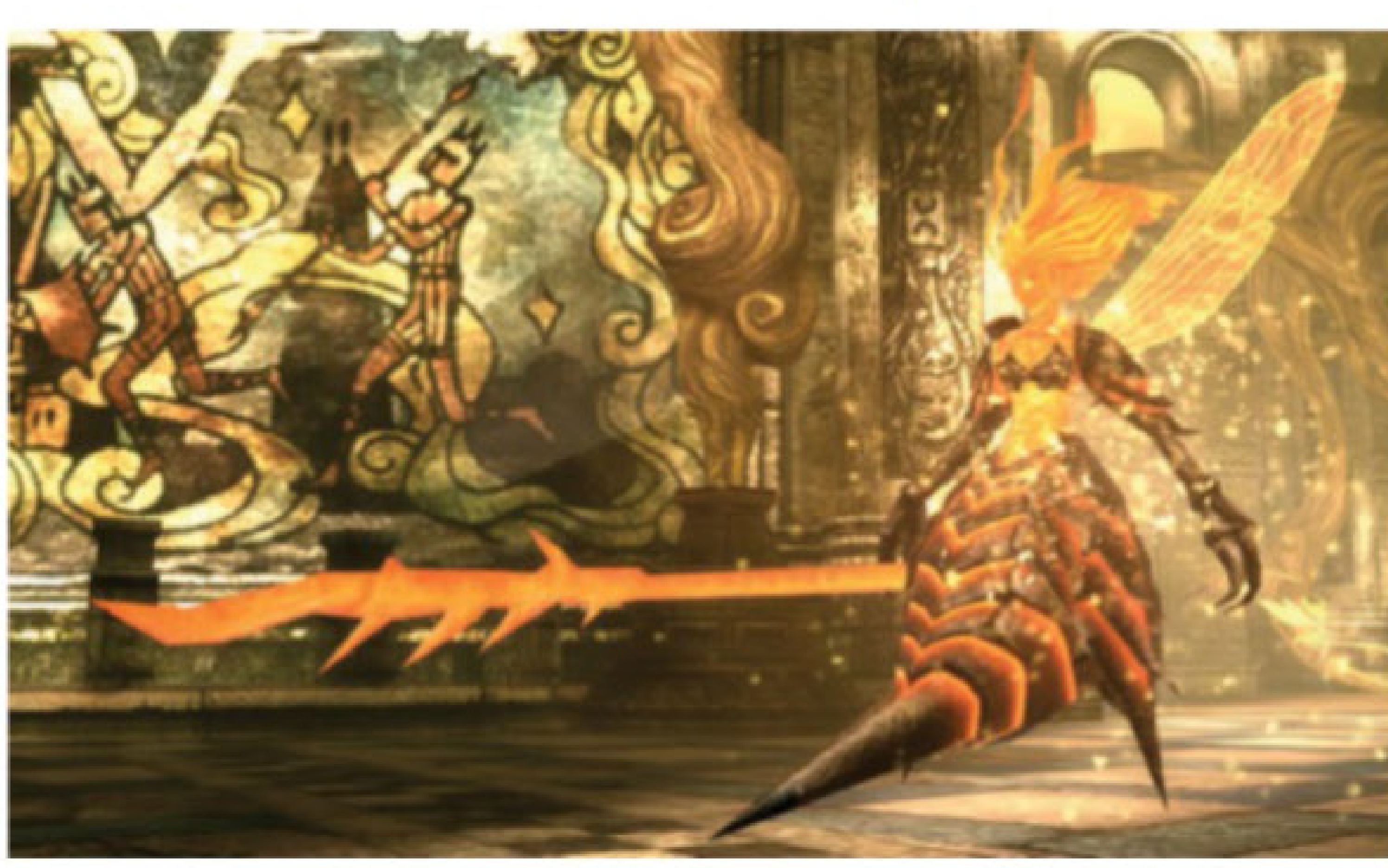




WORSE THAN
MONSTER HUNTER FREEDOM UNITE

MISSING LINK
WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

MEMORY LAPSE: There are now even more of the strange paper chase missions where memories must be reassembled before you can tackle a quest. We get that they're supposed to offer a change of pace, but we would argue that a game this quickfire doesn't even need that.





Above: Many of the bosses are twisted versions of classic fairytale characters. It may sound lame, but these are some of the most hideous creations you're ever likely to encounter.

A MYSTERY BETTER LEFT UNSOLVED

Murdered: Soul Suspect

We are quick to celebrate new IP in this industry, especially when a studio is daring enough to try and infuse an antiquated genre with a fresh narrative. But there's little to celebrate in Murdered: Soul Suspect. A murder mystery filled with more red herrings than resolutions, a great concept marred by inconsistent design and narration. It finds itself struggling to play by its own rules, afraid to commit to its core concept.

Which is a shame, because we were sold on the B-movie vibe from the outset, but *Murdered* did its best to whittle us down over the course of its eight-hour campaign. Opening with protagonist Ronan O'Connor being thrown helplessly out a fourth storey window before being ruthlessly gunned down in the street, he's miraculously reborn in the afterlife. It's an opportunity to solve his own murder, as much as it is a chance to spy on the bland citizens of Salem, Massachusetts.

Playing as a ghost in *Murdered* certainly has its moments, but your powers are so insanely limited and the gameplay loop is so serviceable, that it barely innovates past point-and-click adventure game conventions set two decades ago by the likes of *Monkey Island*. At times, it even feels like *Murdered* is playing itself.

You'll spend the majority of your time navigating small environments as you hunt persistently for clues. *Murdered* will let you know how many are remaining, and it has no intention of letting you proceed until you have the required amount. It's a shame, because the puzzles are so rudimentary that you'll be ready to move on instantly. Instead, Airtight thinks your idea of fun is to walk aimlessly around until you eventually come across the clue that confirms yes, you were thrown out of a window as the opening cut scene highlighted. The *L.A Noire* style-investigation system employed here relies on the puzzles you're solving being based in logic and reason, two areas *Murdered* is greatly lacking.

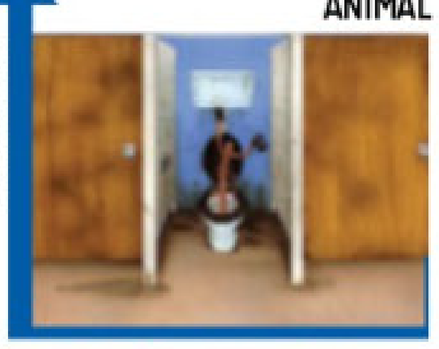
In fact, the only area *Murdered* looks to challenge is through irritating stealth sections that force Ronan to escape from demons wandering the limbo world. If they catch you, they'll suck your soul away and leave you looking at a lengthy loading screen. You'll either need to get past them by ducking into 'ghost holes' – giving you space to instant execute the demons from behind – or just run right past them. Considering how unintuitive the rest of *Murdered* is, it's no surprise that the AI leaves a lot to be desired.

The story is entertaining in theory, but the gameplay mechanics are uninspired and borderline on being broken entirely. *Murdered* treats the player like an idiot, never letting the puzzles or investigations require anything more than a glance. A waste of a great concept. We tried, but *Murdered* just didn't want to be enjoyed.

DETAILS

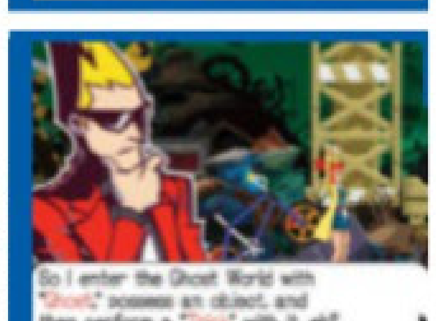
FORMAT: PlayStation 4
OTHER FORMATS: Multi
ORIGIN: USA
PUBLISHER: Square Enix
DEVELOPER: Airtight Games
PRICE: £44.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN



ANIMAL

WORSE THAN



GHOST TRICK: PHANTOM DETECTIVE

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

A REAL OPEN WORLD: While Salem is relatively open between missions, most of the areas are restricted. Since when are ghosts limited by boundaries?

VERDICT 3/10

GREAT CONCEPT RUINED BY INCONSISTENT DESIGN

Below: *Soul Suspect* throws you into a limbo world. It's a bland, depressing world to inhabit, but maybe that's the point,.







Above: While we were frustrated by *Murdered*, Airtight has packed the game with collectibles to find. These flesh out the side-characters and do a good job of filling the blanks.

TETRIS-STYLE TRIPPIN'

Pullblox World

Perhaps the highest praise you could give *Pullblox World* is that the absence of what appeared to be the original game's defining feature makes such a negligible difference. Though better-suited to an autostereoscopic display, these 3D puzzles work out fine in HD, thanks to a simple, but solid visual treatment and the ability to rotate camera angles with the right stick. Distance and depth is as easy to judge as it was before, which shifts the focus back where it should be: the puzzles themselves.

This time there are 250 of them, and while a number are repeated from the series' 3DS debut, few will feel short-changed. Equally, while only a handful of new mechanics have been introduced – including the entirely separate Mysterious puzzles, where pulling one block moves all like-coloured pieces. This is a formula that is compelling, without the need to shake things up too much. New gadgets, such as the pushback switch that makes blocks retreat to their original position, force enough of a strategic rethink without overly complicating things; in light of complaints about the inscrutability of *Fallblox*'s later puzzles, that's certainly a good idea. Nintendo's recent safety-first approach when it comes to the majority of its sequels simply isn't an issue.

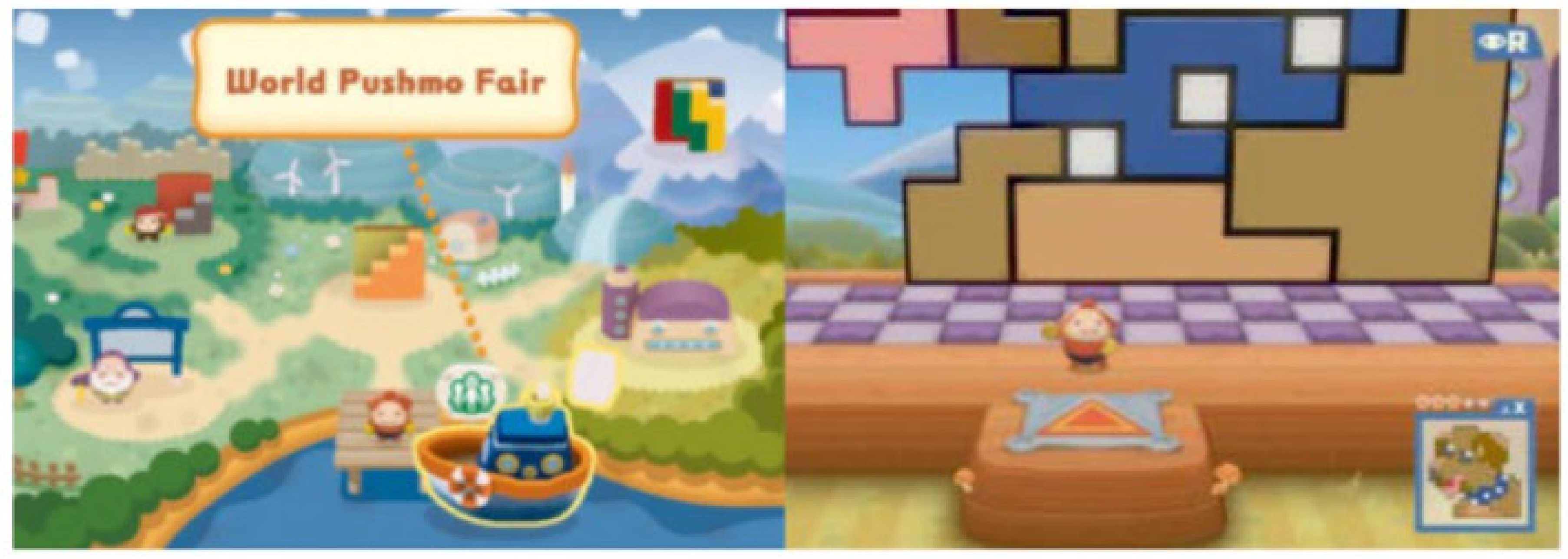
That's because *Pullblox* happens to be one of Nintendo's best ideas in some time. Intelligent Systems has conceived a puzzle game that doles out satisfying epiphanies on a regular basis as you pull and push blocks to create a route to the trapped child trapped. You'll chew over solutions for minutes at a time, finding yourself stumped until a flash of realisation strikes and the next step presents itself. Your rewards are a cute fanfare (which, in the timeworn Nintendo fashion, quickly becomes something of an earworm) followed by an adorable animation of mawashi-wearing hero Mallo throwing and catching the rescued child.

Getting stuck is a natural part of the process, but the frustration of your inability to puzzle things out is alleviated in a number of ways. You can retreat to the training area, whose conundrums are specifically designed to teach you the intricacies of the game's systems, while if you're really struggling, you can skip the puzzle to unlock the next. You're not punished for failure, but you'll earn Miiverse stamps for successfully completing each set of ten puzzles: enough temptation to return for those children you didn't manage to save on your first attempt. Should you have exhausted the game's generous supply of puzzles, you can design your own or download user-created ones via the Miiverse-enhanced World *Pullblox* Fair. It all adds up to just enough to make the upgrade from 3DS worthwhile. Newcomers, meanwhile, are in for a real treat.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Wii U
OTHER FORMATS: N/A
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Intelligent Systems
PRICE: £8.99
RELEASE: June 19
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: YES

Below: As the puzzles get larger, you'll need to stop to take stock – a squeeze of the right-shoulder button gives you an overview of the structure. The left-shoulder button allows you to rewind time.



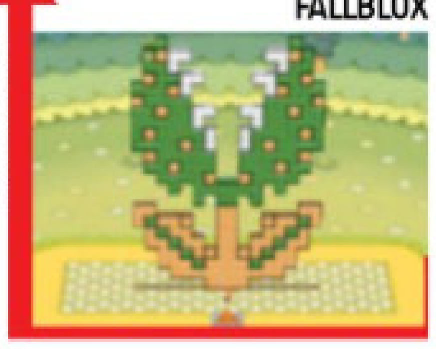
CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

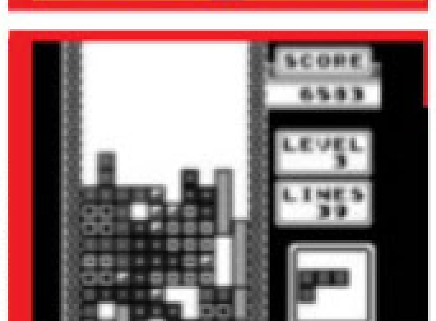
CODE READ: You can link up with the 3DS version, using your GamePad camera to read QR codes, or producing your own on Wii U to download on the portable game. Only puzzles that use gadgets exclusive to the Wii U game are incompatible.

AS GOOD AS

FALLBLOX



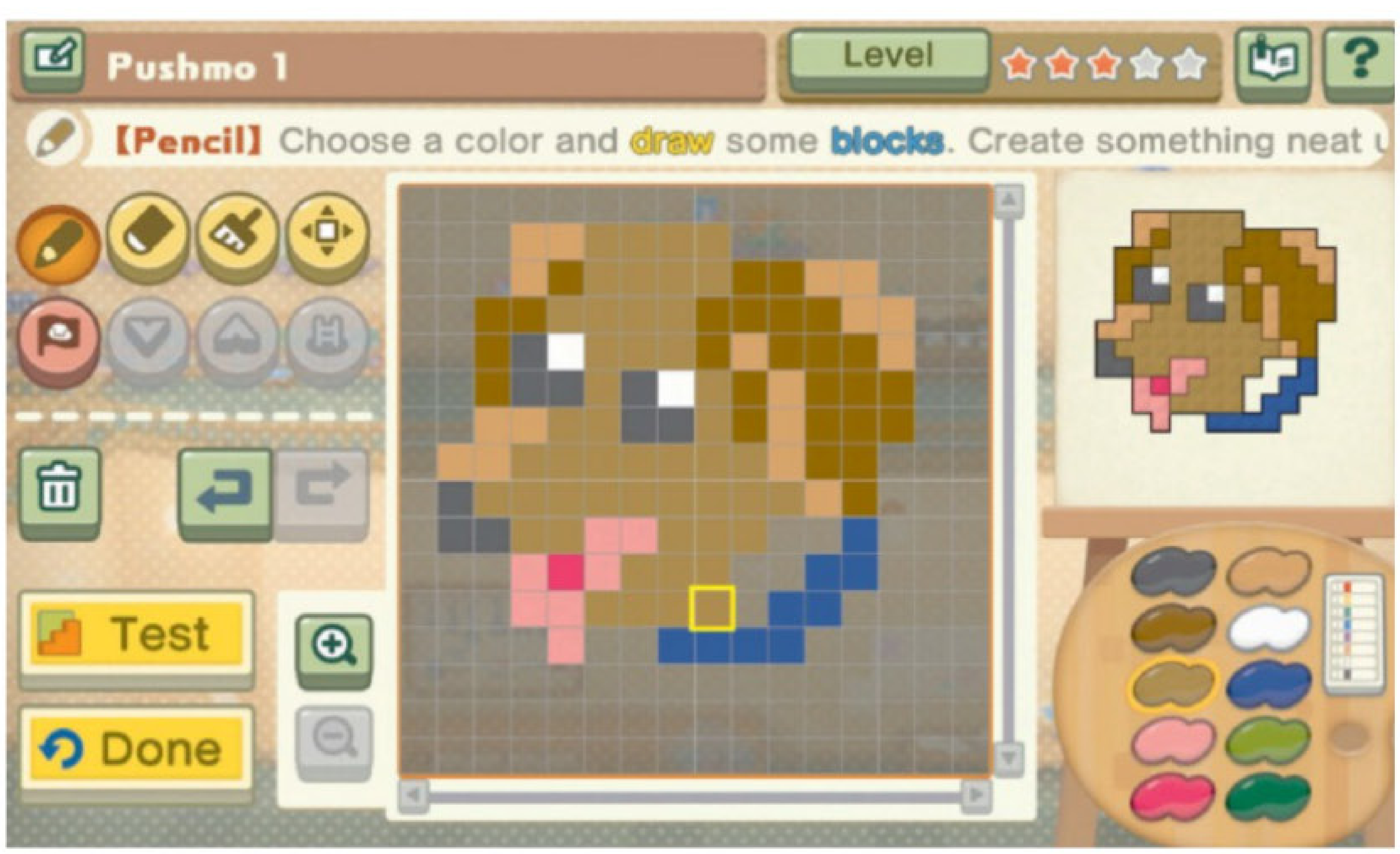
WORSE THAN



TETRIS

VERDICT 8/10

NO SURPRISES, JUST AN EXCELLENT EXPANSION





Above: It's not long before the studio opens, though gadgets remain greyed out until you've unlocked them in the campaign. An intuitive interface makes creation simple.





Left: Your choices with this lost dog are to return her to her owner or to sell her to a dogfighting ring. You're a walking disaster area.

SOMETIMES MONSTROUS, ALWAYS DEPRESSING

Always Sometimes Monsters

It appears John starved to death in his sleep. After an exhausting day doing a minimum wage job, he forgot to eat, and the alley he slept in didn't provide enough shelter. Looks like he'll never get his book published or win his girl back.

Always Sometimes Monsters is an adventure-RPG with a downbeat attitude. You play as an individual who's just won a lucrative publishing contract. An opening party sequence allows you to customise the genders and ethnicity of your character and their lover, and all seems rosy as they raise their glasses in a toast.

The game then cuts to a year later, when your character's out of money, with no book to show and no job, and the love of their life is due to marry someone else in a month's time. Within thirty minutes you've also lost your home. Beyond that, the narrative branches, which means you might help a friend cope with drug addiction, sell a lost pup into a dog fighting club, or get a career in the media or advertising. At every stage, though, you're struggling to make ends meet while living on the streets of the USA.

Given this original, if depressing, premise, the developers have made a good stab at replicating the absolute misery of hitting rock-bottom, and crafted a fine story about someone clawing their way back up. The dialogue choices that make up most of the game throw up tough moral questions every minute, while building a solid wider story arc. As you rush from one depressing task to another, you'll inevitably encounter moments that ring true to your personal life or surprise you with the game's realistic treatment of discrimination. It's those moments of surprising empathy that make *ASM* shine.

Its frustrating, then, that this sharpness is let down by wobbly mechanics. Many of the jobs are stilted, repetitive and dull minigames, shoe-horned into an engine that doesn't want them. This is almost certainly a design decision, to reflect the issues of minimum-wage jobs, but that intent doesn't make the tasks fun.

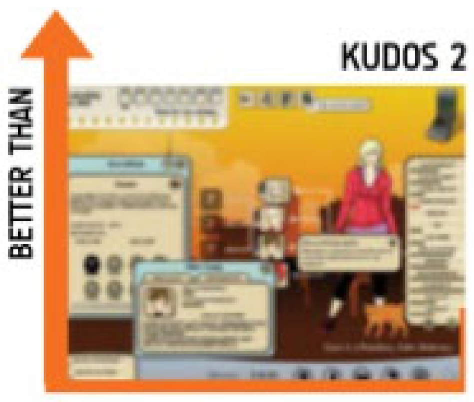
Similarly, though it performed well for *To The Moon*, the RPG Maker engine behind ASM is showing its age. The game only recognises a keyboard as an input, but behaves as if you're using a gamepad, so it won't let you type directly, instead using the arrow keys for agonising letter selection.

There is nothing playful about the *Always Sometimes Monsters* experience – it's a mixture of repetitive tasks and increasingly depressing plots. This then is a 'life-failure' simulator, like Cliff Harris's sandbox *Kudos 2*. Like that, it's compelling, and moving – but hard to call fun.

DETAILS

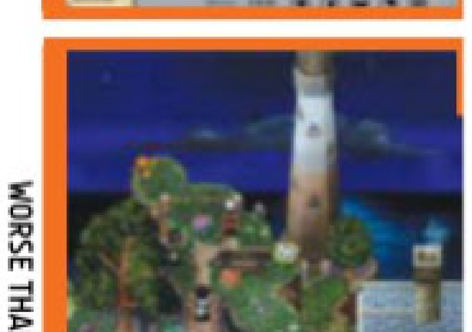
FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Devolver Digital
DEVELOPER: Vagabond Dog
PRICE: £6.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
MINIMUM SPEC: 2.0Ghz P4, 512MB Ram, no graphics card, 500MB HDD
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN



KUDOS 2

WORSE THAN



TO THE MOON

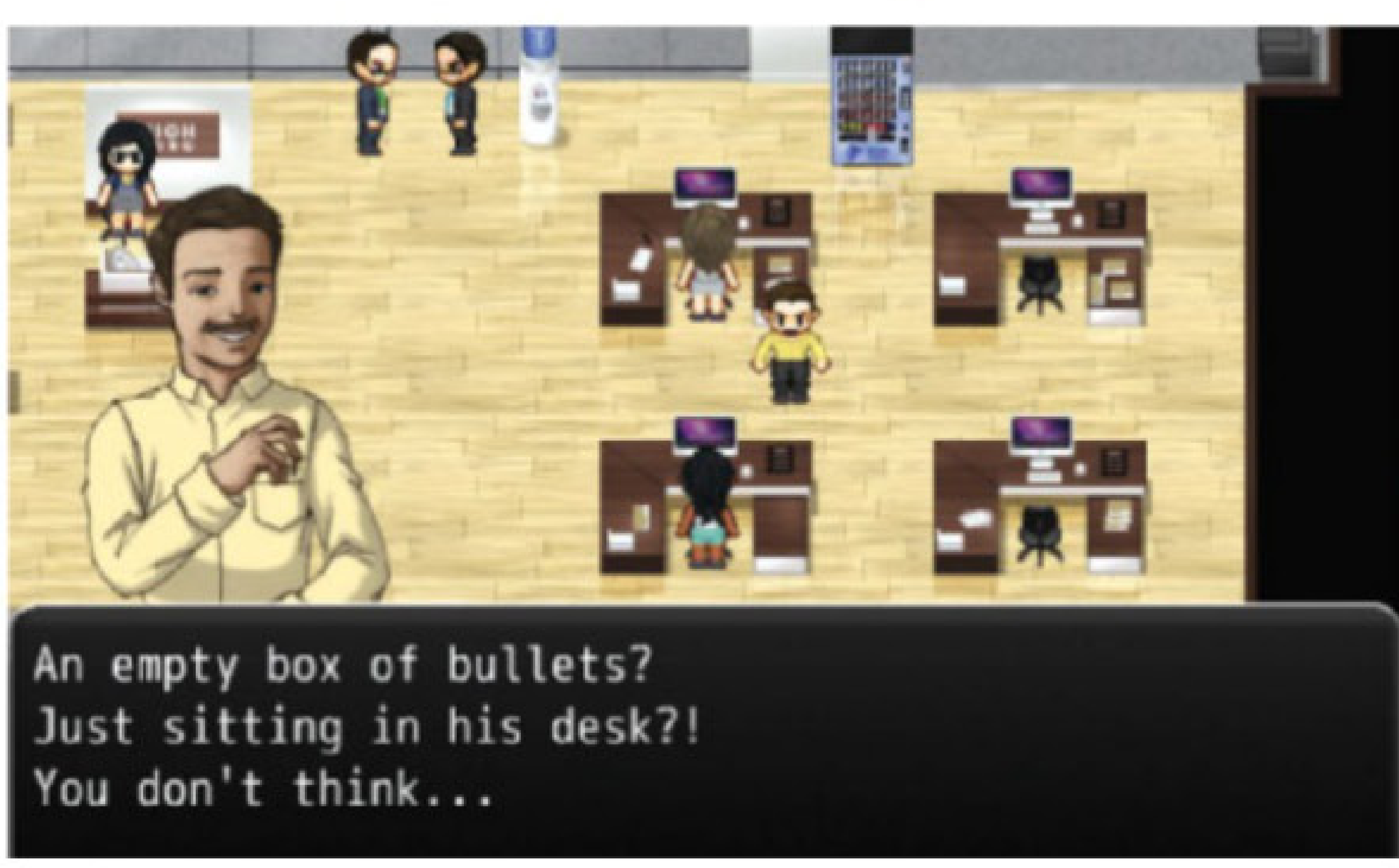
FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

DESTITUTION: A realistic simulation of a quickly passed-over topic.
TOLERANCE: Treats racism, homophobia, drug use and other topics delicately and maturely.

VERDICT 6/10

A RICH CONCEPT IMPOVERISHED BY A CREAKING ENGINE





Above: Living on the streets, you cling on to the last threads of life by performing a host of repetitive tasks that riddle your fingers with despair in increasingly depressing plots.

TAKE ANOTHER LAP

MotoGP 14

Since it is free of any kind of competition, Milestone has it pretty easy. There are no grand sweeping changes with *MotoGP 14*, but then nor are there any outrageous criticisms either. It is the incremental yearly update in every sense of the phrase: neither upsettingly different nor compelling for any but the most devout motorbike enthusiasts.

That doesn't mean there aren't improvements, however. The latest version has the most in-depth levels of difficulty customisation yet. From AI difficulty and the usual dynamic driving lines to the option to alter every aspect of the game's racing assists, meaning you can make it as hardcore or casual as you want. That physics-based simulation core remains untouched, so tweaking these assists gives you full control over how much you ease yourself into the experience. Those not attuned to the art of motorbike racing games will likely struggle at first, and at most points you'll find yourself on the ground rather than anywhere else. In this regard it still suffers from the lack of budget that Milestone so often does, too. The flawless physics of the racing doesn't carry over onto every other aspect – rider dislodges are forced, with the same repeating animations and unrealistic-looking handlebar vaults. Worse still is the way a character resets their racing animation, even when they're travelling at 80mph. Character models and in-menu animations are a little ropey, not that any of these really spoil what makes *MotoGP 14* shine.

Speaking of which, it is worth paying attention to the visuals. Hopping from last-gen to PS4, *MotoGP 14* is Milestone's first foray into the newest set of hardware and it does seem like it's a tentative step forward. The improved visuals are best on the PS4, but it's hardly a next-gen experience. In fact, it's not much greater than anything possible on PS3 or Xbox 360. It's forgivable this time around, but if Milestone wants to draw in more fans that hit currently has, it does need to find that extra gear to polish all these low-budget problems that affect an otherwise infallible motorbike racing game.

Elsewhere the latest version of *MotoGP* features brand new modes that will surely appeal to fans, the most notable being the inclusion of scenario races where you need to achieve particular objectives against the odds in a bid to re-enact – or even alter – the real-world events of 2013's *MotoGP*. That, alongside the addition of the new Argentina track, will likely get Moto fans sweating with anticipation, but to everyone else it's news that will fall on deaf ears. Ultimately *MotoGP 14*'s upgrades and changes make it a worthy upgrade over last year's, but while it might be an easy race for Milestone to win it still needs to put a little extra work in the garage to turn the series into a must-buy.

VERDICT 7/10

STRUGGLES TO GET THAT FINAL SIXTH GEAR

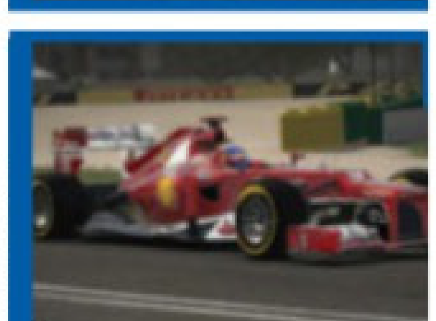
DETAILS

FORMAT: PS4
OTHER FORMATS: PS3, PS Vita, Xbox 360, PC
ORIGIN: Italy
PUBLISHER: Milestone
DEVELOPER: In-House
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: 20 June 2014
PLAYERS: 1-12
ONLINE REVIEWED: No

BETTER THAN

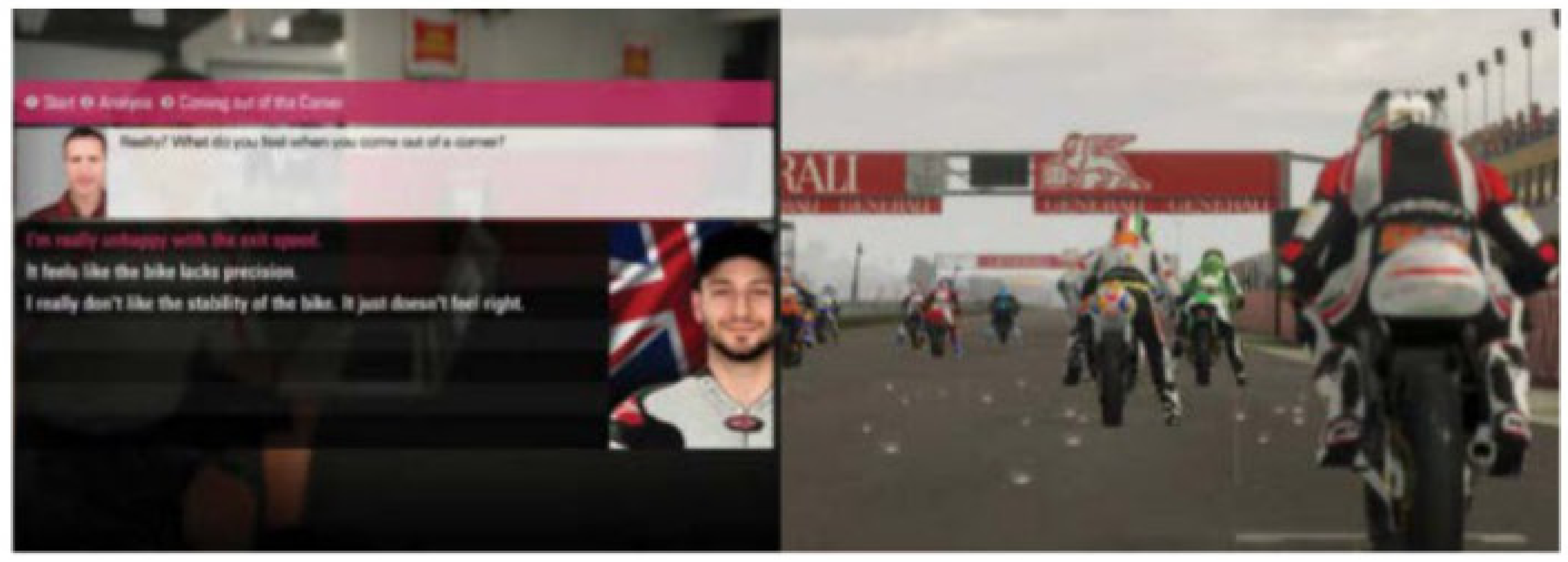
MOTOGP 13





F1 2013

WORSE THAN



Below: There's a photo mode option, which would be a fantastic combination with the PS4's in-built image sharing function, but sadly *MotoGP 14* have impressive visuals to make it a compelling addition.

X GENERATION

BETWEEN THE GENERATIONS

MOTO CROSS-GEN: There's not much between the two different generations, which makes it seem ever more apparent that Milestone's efforts were divided when trying to get the most from each platform.



Above: The canned animations when falling off a bike don't have the necessary physicality about it. For all the physics underpinning, it's a shame the same isn't true throughout.





NOT QUITE A WAKE-UP CALL

Among The Sleep



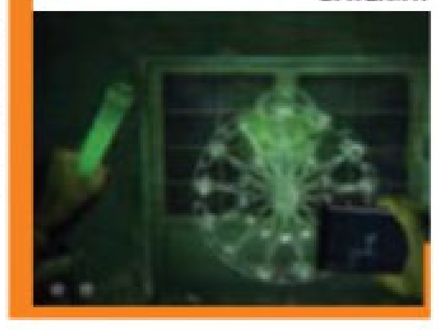
Above: Being a baby is a lovely experience, with the low viewpoint giving an interesting, skewed perspective. You are slow, clumsy, and you feel completely vulnerable as you stumble through the house and dreamscape.

DETAILS

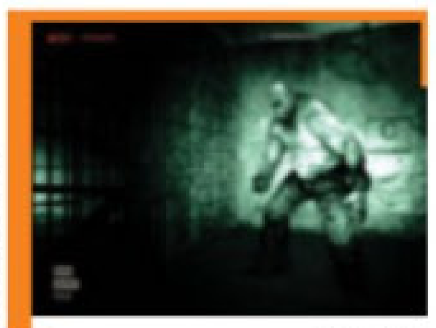
FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: PS4
ORIGIN: Norway
PUBLISHER: Krillbite Studio
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £14.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
MINIMUM SPEC: WindowsXP SP2, 2.4GHz dual core CPU. 2GB RAM, GeForce400/ AMD Radeon HD 4000/Intel HD 4000

BETTER THAN

DAYLIGHT



WORSE THAN



OUTLAST

Without context, and bolstered by a burgeoning imagination, a toddler's viewpoint makes the ordinary world a strange place. A clothes-cluttered closet becomes a twisting, dreadful corridor, and the tread of approaching footsteps is turned into a primal thump. *Among The Sleep*'s horror tale plays with that perspective, turning the real world into an atmospheric, but sadly trite, first-person puzzle game.

You play as a surprisingly well-realised toddler. The cumbersome, stodgy movement of the boy is never so stilted that it becomes a problem. It makes you feel vulnerable and awkward, but you can still climb shelves and carry helpful objects. There are some nice subtle details, including an occasional breathy squeak when scary things happen, and a stumble when you run for too long. It all makes you care for the little tyke.

It's the world and puzzles that let *Among The Sleep* down, then. It starts off beautifully, letting you wander your bedroom and play, accompanied by a comforting and surprisingly well-acted talking teddy, before plunging you into a surreal nightmare. In the house, the fear is mostly squeezed from the everyday world, so a fridge's glow and hum is exaggerated to terrifying levels. The challenges arise from the mundane setting, too, where the drawers of a chest of drawers, tugged out at various lengths, become a climbing frame.



MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

HOUSE PROUD: The family home is a scarier place to explore, and the game should have stayed there. The mundane horror is much more effective than the fantastical later levels.

But a trip to the basement takes the setting from a house to a world twisted beyond recognition, where paintings become portals to far more extreme worlds, and the imagination has taken root and grown over recognisable areas of the garden and house. The Tim Burton-esque twist is stunning, but the environments are so different that the familiarity is lost, so instead of feeling a connection, it feels like another game. Here the puzzles are spread too widely, and they never ask you to do anything more complicated than hunt down objects to use on other objects. For something so delightfully designed, it's also a bit turgid. A game that lasts no more than a couple of hours really shouldn't need padding.

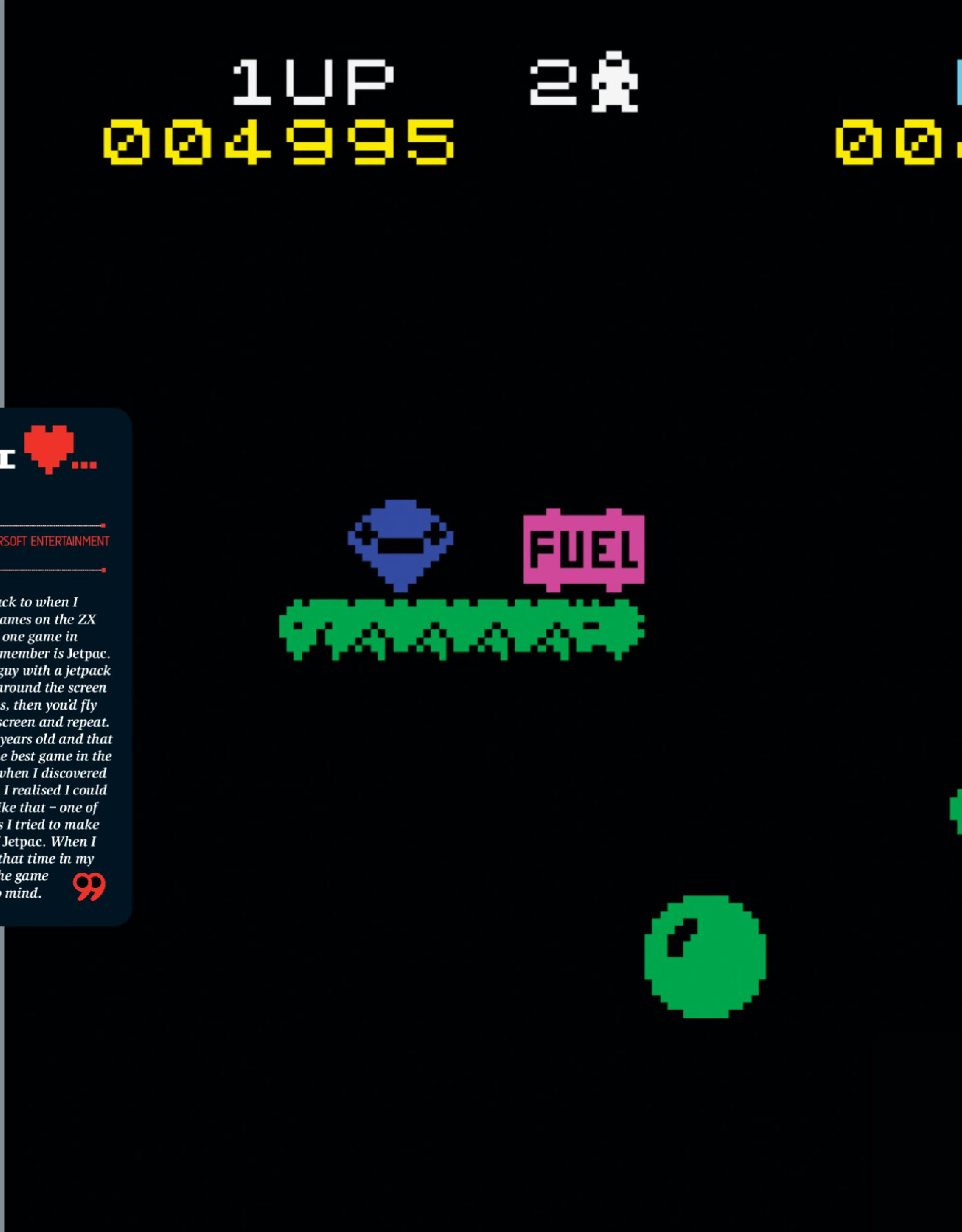
The monster, a beast that's only hinted at for most of the game, is a screeching, wandering plot spoiler. Up close it reveals the truth the developer is doing its best only to hint at. We know from the moment it plucks us from the ground what it is, and the context is so heavy-handed that there is no mystery. It's an admirable, atmospheric effort, but one that forgets the strength of its core idea. *Among The Sleep* is worth experiencing, but there are better-made horror games around.



Above: The bear is a constant companion, and though it initially feels like it's deliberately leading you into trouble, it's simply there to help the player make sense of the abstract concept. And to hug.

VERDICT 5/10

FINAL COMMENT: FULL OF FLAIR, BUT LACKING ANY CHALLENGE.




WHY I ♥...
Jetpac

MICK WEST, NEVERSOFT ENTERTAINMENT CO-FOUNDER

"I look back to when I played games on the ZX Spectrum and one game in particular I remember is Jetpac. It was a little guy with a jetpack and you flew around the screen shooting aliens, then you'd fly onto the next screen and repeat. I was 14 or 15 years old and that seemed like the best game in the world. Then, when I discovered programming, I realised I could make games like that – one of the first games I tried to make was a clone of Jetpac. When I think back to that time in my life Jetpac is the game that springs to mind."

"One of the first games I tried to make was a clone of Jetpac"

MICK WEST, NEVERSOFT ENTERTAINMENT CO-FOUNDER


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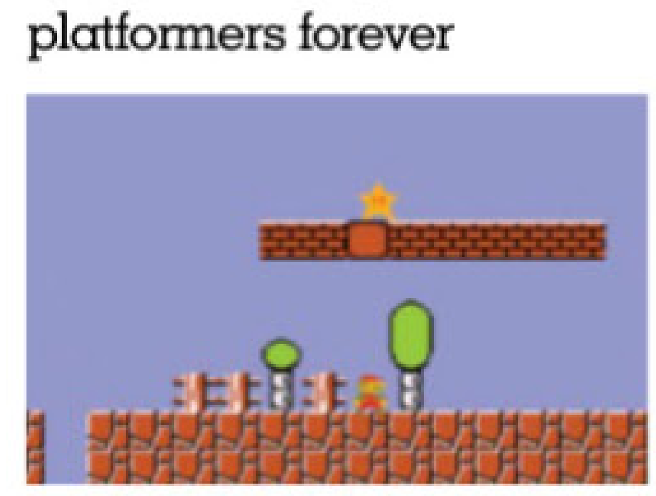
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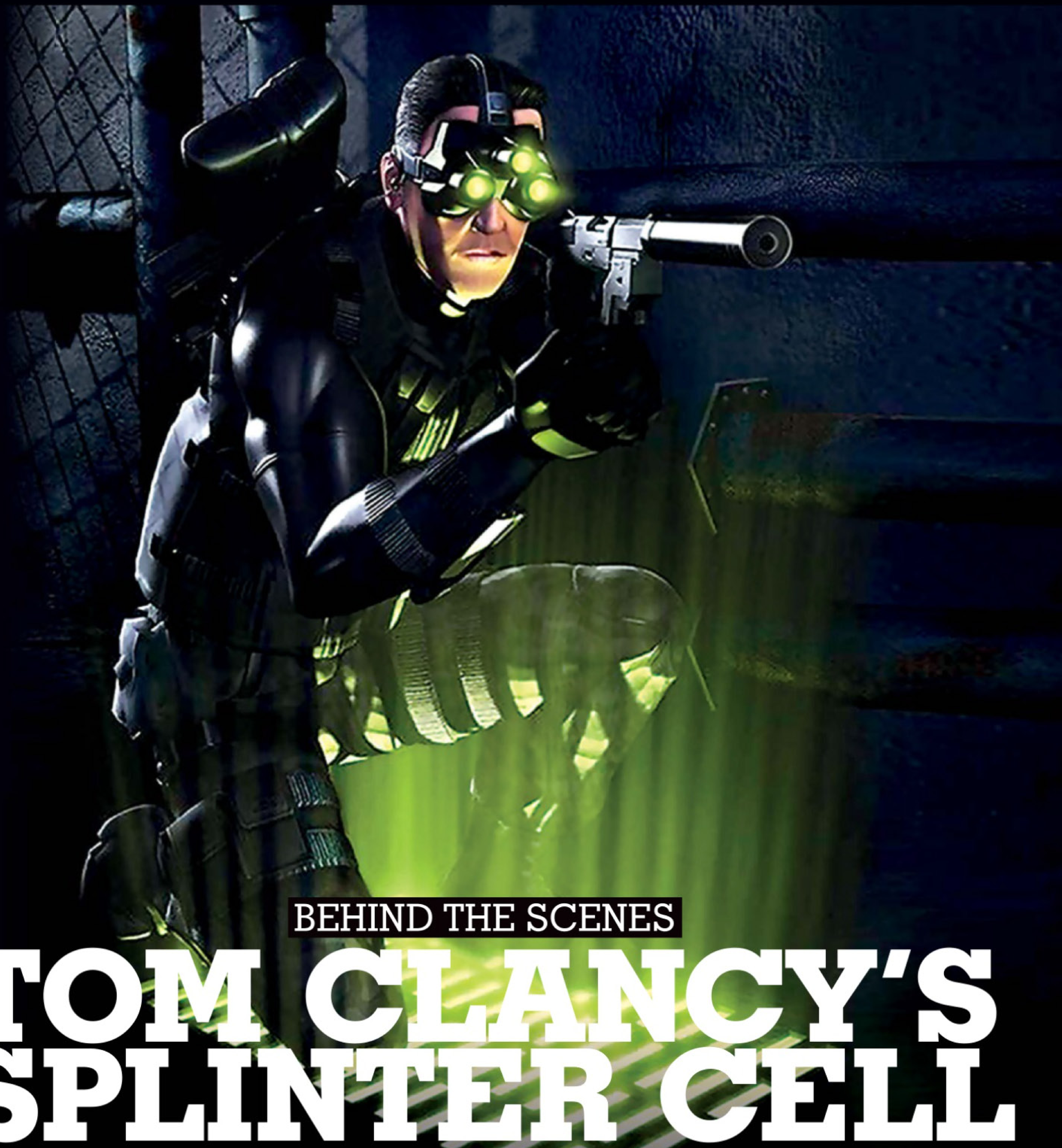
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BEHIND THE SCENES

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL

149 issues ago, games™ featured a particular game on its front cover. So we went back to those who made Splinter Cell to find out: why did it deserve to be there?

BY 2002 WE had seen Tom Clancy's name on plenty of games – *Ghost Recon, Rainbow Six, Red Storm Rising* and many more. It was already a mark of quality and reason enough to get excited about a game, which is why *Splinter Cell* adorned the cover of this very magazine for its first ever issue. We, like the rest of the world, were excited for this hardcore, thinking person's take on the then-underpopulated stealth genre – and 12 years later we're still feeling the effects.

"The moment we all understood we had something," Hugo Landreville-Potvin, level designer on *Splinter Cell*, told us, "was when we realised the *Metal Gear* team was in the crowd [at E3 2002], pen and paper in hands, carefully taking notes. *Splinter Cell* was not just another game; it was a challenger."

Splinter Cell had been bubbling away under the surface for years, but it took a long time to be recognised. Initially it was a retro sci-fi shooter called *The Drift* featuring flying vehicles, floating island settings and – tellingly – spy gadgets like a grappling hook and the ability to shoot cameras into walls.

Development on *The Drift* didn't get much further than a demo stage before the idea segued into something more familiar – a James Bond-style spy game. But that project didn't move much and was shelved – until Ubisoft acquired *Red Storm* and the Tom Clancy back catalogue. With this new licence to hand, the studio figured it could make something with the idea that had been put on hold. The team was tasked with making 'a *Metal Gear Solid 2* killer'.

Martin Caya, lead character artist on what became *Splinter Cell*, said: "After Ubisoft acquired *Red Storm* back in 2000, the company wanted to create a new action game based on the universe found within the Tom Clancy novels, more specifically the *Op-Center* book.

"So our game started out focusing on a character named Brett August. But it was soon decided that our game, although still set in the Clancy-verse, would centre around a new protagonist."

With a bit of back-story written by JT Petty, it was left to Caya to come up with an idea on just who those picking up *Splinter Cell* would be playing as.

"I was pretty much on my own when I first started designing Sam," he said. "I was coming up with ideas I thought were cool. But the more I was progressing on the design the more opposition I was encountering from some of the higher-ups. I remember some really long meetings where every aspect of Sam's design was being questioned.

"For instance, when I originally pitched the idea that we needed a strong visual gimmick for our game, something as recognisable as Batman's silhouette is in pop culture, I presented the now famous 'three green dots'. That idea was almost instantly shot down."

ONE OF MODERN gaming's most iconic elements of design, Sam Fisher's night vision goggles weren't just an element that affected how you played, allowing you to cycle between heat and night vision modes – they defined the character.

"Looking back now," Caya continued, "it wasn't really professional on my part – but I just didn't care about office politics. I still fought tooth and nail for that concept simply because I believed in it.

"That is probably one of the things I am the most proud of, the idea that when you see those green dots, you know right away that it's Sam."

Roxane Gosselin, associate producer on the first game, agreed: "The Sam Fisher character took more than two years of research and improvements to finalise. We worked so hard to find a really identifiable element – I remember wishing that the three dots could be alone on a box and people would be able to recognise it."

And, of course, there was the Ironside element – something Neil Alphonso, level designer on the game, is still a big fan of to this day: "Apart from being a badass tech ninja, I always liked that Sam was older than the typical video game protagonist. That was always the vision for him, and then getting



Released: November 2002
Format: Xbox, PC, PS2, GameCube, Mac, PS3
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal, Ubisoft Shanghai (PS2 & GC)
Key Staff: Neil Alphonso, level designer
Roxane Gosselin, associate producer
Martin Caya, lead character artist
Hugo Landreville-Potvin, level designer



The split-legged stalking is something we've all tried to emulate since 2002. Most of us have failed, mind.

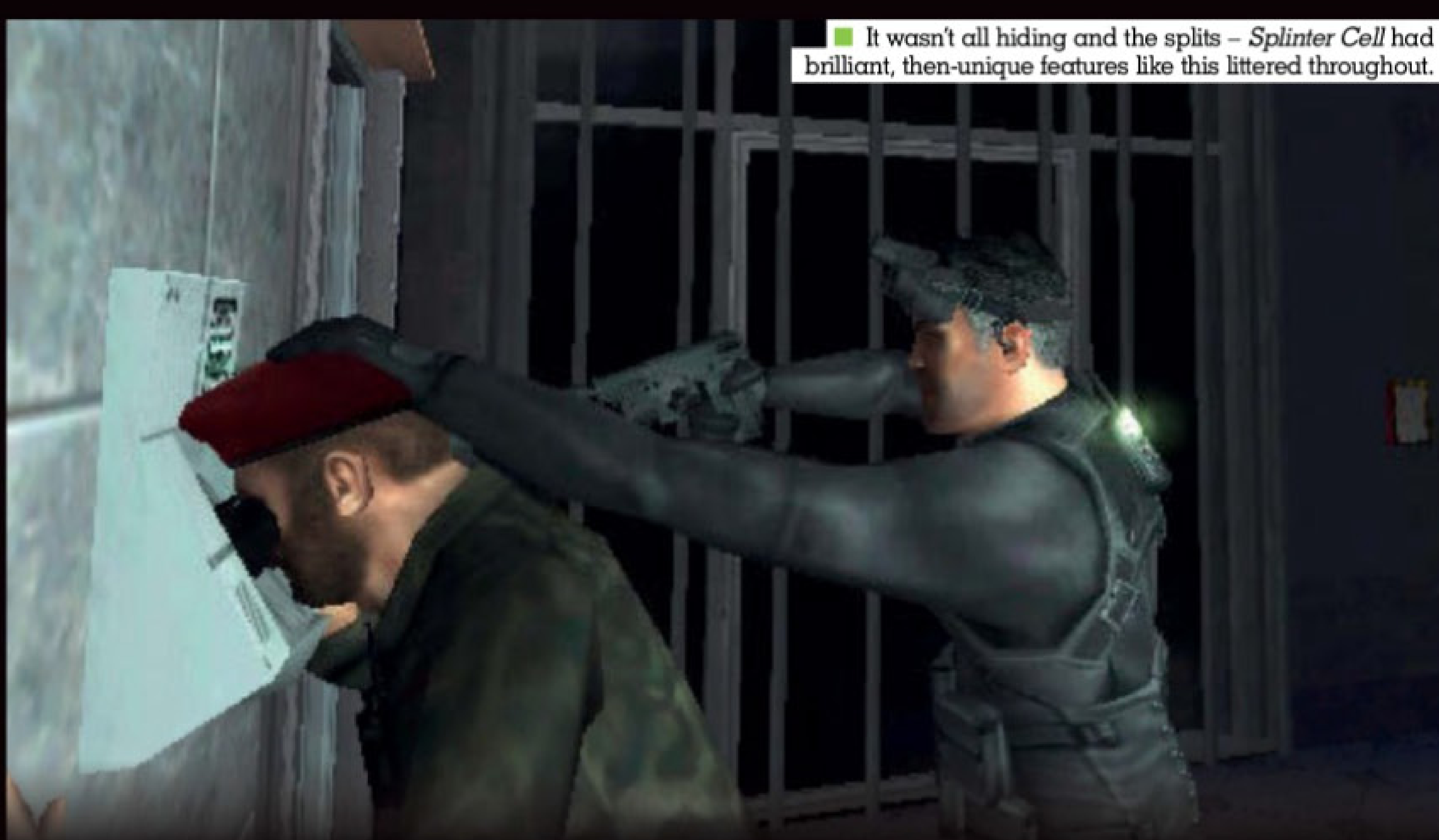
FROM PORT TO PORT

Splinter Cell was big news for Ubisoft – and the gaming world in general – back in 2002, so it's no real surprise that the game was ported to a wide range of different formats. While the cut-back PS2 version and HD re-release on PS3 followed the original template closely, there were also a number of curios like the Game Boy Advance version – later ported to the N-Gage.

What makes *Splinter Cell*'s port to this format even more interesting is that the GBA/N-Gage version was pretty well-received at the time, even if it was a straightforward 2D sidescroller rather than a full 3D sneak-'em-up. *Splinter Cell* on the Nintendo handheld even had some early indicators of things to come, as the GBA could be hooked up to the GameCube version and used as a map-sporting second screen.







It wasn't all hiding and the splits – *Splinter Cell* had brilliant, then-unique features like this littered throughout.



Michael Ironside to be his voice just totally nailed it."

This sort of enthusiastic creativity wasn't just limited to the design of Sam Fisher – *Splinter Cell* had a small team working on the game and didn't see much interference from the powers that be. Alphonso said the game was unlike anything Ubisoft had done before.

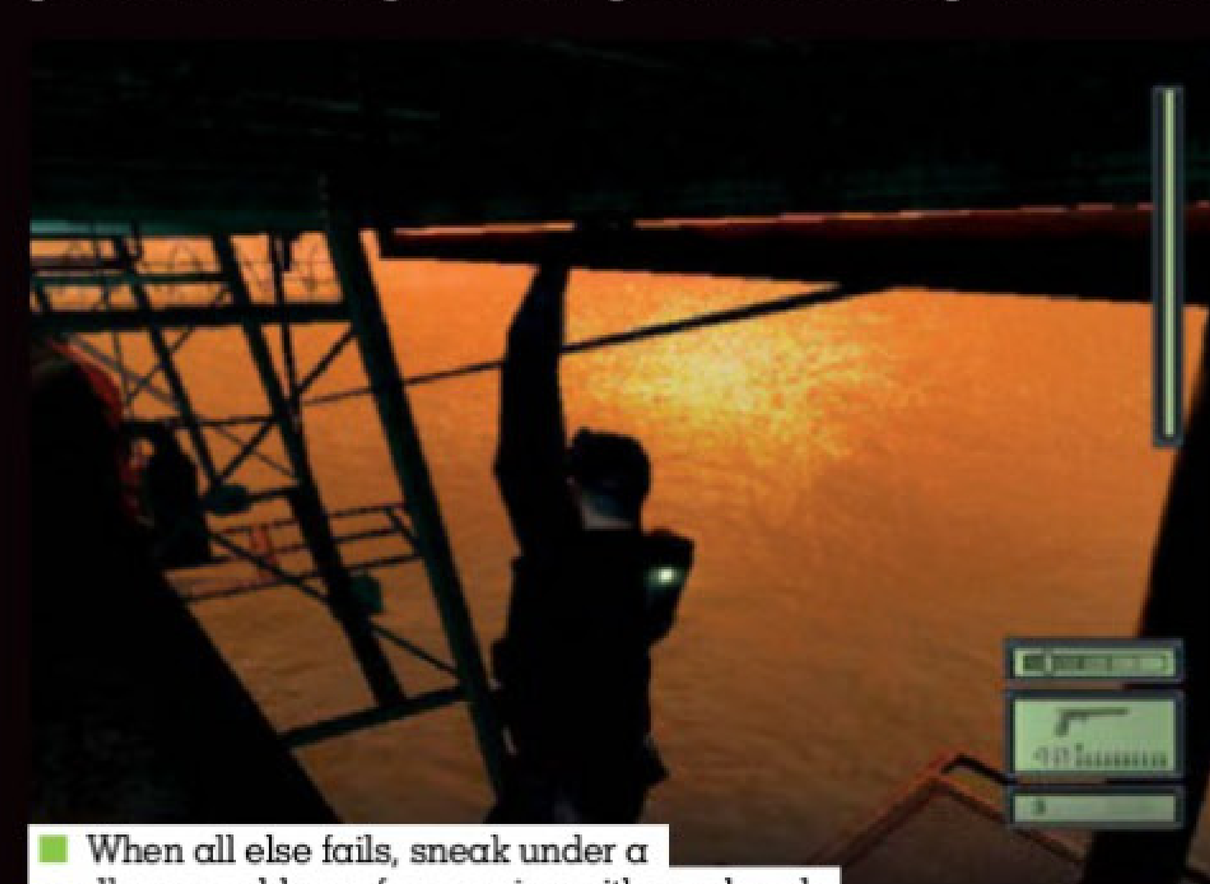
"The corporate structure was fairly hands-off when it came to the actual design," he told us, "but they provided some great guidance to keep a semblance of accessibility as the game got more and more difficult."

Caya corroborated this stay-away management aspect, saying: "From what I can remember, upper management wasn't particularly present early on. For the prototyping phase, we were pretty much left to our own devices. Everyone would participate in establishing what the different aspects of the game would be. It really was a team effort and an exciting time for a 25-year-old new to the industry. On the other hand, after the game was showcased at E3 in 2002, all eyes were on us."

Being worked on by a small, nimble team meant things would always be progressing, changing and moving forwards, as Landreville-Potvin explained: "The team for the original *Splinter Cell* was a small one. Design and level design totalled seven people – leading to easy interactions between us. Each level would have a defined location with specific main story events and goals, but we were left with lots of creative freedom for secondary goals and design throughout our levels."

COMPARED TO THE modern, gigantic productions of the series, the original game's creation was unique in a number of ways. "We didn't really have a creative director," Gosselin explained. "Creative direction was led by a creative team, which I was part of. At the time Ubisoft Montreal was a pretty new studio and we didn't really have any 'mentors' besides the editorial team. All the work on *Splinter Cell* was intuitive but we always took the time to analyse properly – and we did a lot of research."

This new-ish studio and brand new concept resulted in a few other elements that we – these days – take for granted. As Gosselin told us, *Splinter Cell* was one of the first games Ubisoft worked on to include extensive playtesting as a part of its design. "Our goal was really to make a



When all else fails, sneak under a walkway and hang from a pipe with one hand.



Back in the day, *Splinter Cell*'s lighting was unbelievably good – and important to the actual game.

WHAT THEY SAID...



The refined level design takes full advantage of the gadgets and the abilities of your character while striking a good balance so that you get your ass kicked on plenty of occasions
NowGamer, November 2002

game that people would enjoy," she told us, "and we spent a lot of time polishing and improving the fun factor and playability."

There is one question that often comes up with the mention of these particular branded games: how much involvement, if any, did Tom Clancy actually have? "I can honestly say that I never saw the man on the studio floor," Caya told us, "but I believe JT Petty, the game's writer, was in contact with him – though I wasn't privy to those types of meetings myself."

Gosselin, on the other hand, was more certain of the big man's influence over *Splinter Cell*: "Tom Clancy was really involved in the story – he reviewed the script and gave us a lot of good advice."

With or without Clancy's involvement though, *Splinter Cell* saw a quick-footed process of design, implementation and testing. This meant that changes could be brainstormed, put in the game and tried out in an active setting before ultimately being kept or killed.

Landreville-Potvin explained: "Basic creation of the levels was relatively quick to do. Most of our time was spent perfecting each gameplay section, like making sure all the patrolling guards always ended up at the right place at the right time, and endlessly testing to be certain all paths were achievable."

But just because you can be quick and change things in a nimble fashion doesn't mean you're always going to get it right: "The first levels we made were never completed. We made mistakes. But in the long run they served the purpose of focusing the level design direction. And I believe they were reworked as bonus levels later on anyway."

Beyond that particular learning process, *Splinter Cell* saw other big changes through its development process. As Landreville-Potvin pointed out, there were two big, important changes carried out during

"IT WAS AN EXCITING TIME. AFTER THE GAME WAS SHOWCASED AT E3 IN 2002, ALL EYES WERE ON US"

Splinter Cell's development. "The first one was the level design direction," he said. "In the Splinter Cell the player can go through an area using different approaches of stealth, gadgets and combat. But ultimately, the progression through a level is linear.

"The original level design direction was more of an open one with multiple interconnecting areas, closer to the *Thief* series. Unfortunately, for the relatively inexperienced team we were at the time, this was a sure-fire way to do the number one junior level designer mistake: we ended up creating levels that were too big, which resulted in badly paced

THE STORY BEHIND THE SPLIT-JUMP

■ "The funny thing about the whole split-jump concept was that the idea originated from an old *Punisher: War Journal* (issue #12) comic book I had at home," Martin Caya told us.

"In it, the Punisher is being chased by Bushwacker, some badass dude with a cybernetic morphing gun-forearm. By the end of that particular issue of the comic, the Punisher is losing a large amount of blood from sustaining a gunshot wound.

"In a last-ditch effort, he seeks refuge inside one of his nearby safehouses with Bushwacker in tow. Inside the warehouse, Bushwacker follows the trail of blood drops on the ground, taunting Frank Castle (Punisher) with every step, ready to finish the job. When the villain thinks he's got our hero cornered in a storage room, we see that the Punisher has hoisted himself up near the ceiling using a ballistic knife, ready to face his pursuer.

"To this day, I find the reveal in that last panel so f****** awesome, I figured we should have something like that in *Splinter Cell*, especially if Sam would be using a knife. Unfortunately though it didn't pan out that way."





WHAT THEY SAID…



New moves, such as being able to do a split-jump between walls and climb along pipes mounted horizontally, allow for some cunning level designs

EuroGamer, December 2002

gameplay. As a result, the first round of levels were never completed. Afterwards, the level design direction was refocused for the better."

The second change was another big one, Landreville-Potvin told us: "The second change was part of the core design. As we went through development, one problem became clear: Sam Fisher was too powerful. For instance, originally the player could grab any enemy weapon as a secondary gun. In a game that is supposed to focus on stealth, unlimited ammo simply was not fun. Removing this option was a trade-off: realism versus tension and stealth. The choice was obvious."

Alphonso agreed – this modification was a big one: "The single biggest change from my point of view was dropping the ability for Sam to pick up weapons in the field. This basically made running and gunning far more viable than we'd wanted."

But it wasn't the strangest thing to be dropped: "We very briefly had floating collectibles that you had to do split-jumps to collect, but it didn't really fit the tone of the game and fortunately was dropped."

THE RACE TO make *Splinter Cell* a very difficult game didn't stop with a lack of collectible weapons and ammo, though: "The other big design change was the addition of the 'three alarms' mechanic," Landreville-Potvin said. "Each time an alarm would go off, all enemies would get tougher. After three alarms, the mission would be failed. It was a much-debated change that ruthlessly enforced stealth and made the game much harder."

But they were changes – whether ruthless or not – for the better: "Ultimately, those changes made the original *Splinter Cell* a good game, although a hard game… maybe too hard… but that's one reason, I believe, it is remembered."

Other cuts to the game were less important, but have still been revisited or riffed on in later iterations, as Caya told us: "I remember that Steve (Dupont, lead animation director) and I would riff on ideas like Sam using a knife for hand-to-hand combat, or the ability to open doors while carrying a body. Also, I always thought the player should experience the insertion and extraction phase of every operation."

Good ideas. So why drop them in a project so creatively free? "Like any cool sounding ideas, coming up with them isn't nearly as difficult as implementing them in the game without sabotaging the flow of any existing mechanics."

Though Caya made sure to point out one thing *did* make it into the game from these idea-riffs – the split-jump. "We never actually used it extensively," he told us. "That was something I had suggested to Steve who went on to create the split animation, but I think there were only two instances in-game where Sam could actually do that."

Splinter Cell was, back in 2002, one of the most technically-accomplished games available. It has aged, but there are certain screens you can still look at and be impressed by. As Alphonso told us, some parts of the game had to be cut because of time constraints: "A big chunk of the game set in snowy Russia was cut in order to get it out in time and at high quality; the only remnant was my nuclear plant level for the PS2 version."

> "I DON'T THINK ANY OF US COULD FORESEE IT BECOMING A CLASSIC"

But generally speaking this was a game Microsoft was very helpful with – it was the original Xbox's biggest third-party release and a timed exclusive on the format. The eventual PS2 and GameCube ports were technically lacking compared to the format it was built for, and with good reason. "The dynamic lighting model in the game relied heavily on the console's architecture," Alphonso explained, "and we had some additional help from Microsoft to eke out every extra bit of polish and performance."

It was a game sent out to win hearts and minds and convert gamers to the cause of Microsoft's gigantic gaming console. While *Halo* is recognised as the defining game of the original Xbox, *Splinter*

> A GAMING EVOLUTION Metal Gear Solid > Splinter Cell > Arkham City



It didn't invent the stealth genre, but *Metal Gear Solid* definitely made stealth games something people were interested in.



Sam Fisher's shadowy acrobatics had a huge impact on stealth in gaming, best seen in the *Arkham* games.



Cell wasn't far behind. But it wasn't until that showing at E3 2002 that the world really began to take notice. *Splinter Cell* drew elements from elsewhere – it was recognisable and somehow familiar, but it was a unique type of game. The *Metal Gear* developers were in the crowd taking notes for a reason.

Nevertheless, those involved in what ended up being one of the most critically acclaimed games with Tom Clancy's name attached remain humble.

"I don't think anyone on team set out with the idea that we were creating a classic," Caya said. "In all honesty, we just wanted to create a really fun game. Although looking back on the excited reactions from people trying out our demo, we were starting to see we had something special."



A high-def version of the first three games was released on PS3 back in 2011. It was a nice trip down memory lane.

Landreville-Potvin felt similarly: "I don't think any of us could foresee *Splinter Cell* becoming a classic. Sure, after E3 it was clear we had something. It was also clear that it had the buzz to be big at release. But you never know if it's going to meet the expectations for the press and gamers."

But it worked. It was well received, and it started a series that is still running. But where will the future take Sam Fisher? Caya is optimistic: "I think that as long as there are creative people involved in *Splinter Cell* games the series will remain vital. The series still manages to introduce a lot of innovative ideas with every new outing."

Gosselin, meanwhile, prefers to simply look back on *Splinter Cell* with fondness: "It was one of my best experiences. We didn't have many constraints; Ubisoft almost gave us carte blanche on everything. It was a big risk for the company, but a good one.

"I'm not surprised to see where Ubisoft is now – it's one of the biggest game studios in the world, and it deserves it."



The different vision modes in *Splinter Cell* weren't just for show.



It wasn't all tension – sometimes things just up and exploded everywhere.



In this kind of situation it's quite clear that you haven't managed to be stealthy.



Never before had we seen a man cling so tightly to pipes until we met Sam Fisher. Well, everyone has a fetish.



UNCOVERING ATARI'S SECRET

IN A SPECIAL EDITORIAL FROM E.T. CODER HOWARD SCOTT WARSHAW, THE ATARI VETERAN UNCOVERS THE URBAN LEGEND BURIED BENEATH A MEXICAN LANDFILL AND CONFRONTS HIS MOST INFAMOUS CREATION





IT IS AN interesting thing to witness your past being dug up… literally! There I stood amongst tractors and backhoes, pelted repeatedly by the raging sand storm. Waiting… watching… wondering what the next scoop might reveal. Had I actually created a game so devastatingly bad, so horrifically shameful that Atari had no alternative but to truck it ninety miles into the desert and bury it?

Whenever I make a game, my primary design goal is innovation. I seek to create something brand new or *boldly* expand the concept of some existing design. *Yars' Revenge* introduced many features which became industry standards. *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* was by far the most diverse adventure on the platform at the time and it was the first movie conversion ever. And on April 26, 2014 in Alamogordo, New Mexico, I saw *E.T.* (my third game) become groundbreaking in a whole new way. A way I had never imagined while coding it some 32 years earlier.

The day started with a twenty-minute drive (during which we dropped 4,500 feet in elevation) before arriving at the entrance to the area containing the excavation site. Hundreds of people were already queued up there, waiting to be admitted to a garbage dump. Extraordinary. As we approached the dig proper there were camera crews and lights and food trucks and lots of equipment. People were scurrying around in every direction with facemasks and bandanas to keep sand and dust out of their lungs. When they opened the gates a human wave descended upon the site. People came from all over the country, apparently for two reasons. One was to get autographs on any piece of *E.T.* paraphernalia they could carry (or manufacture in some cases). I signed cartridges, boxes, posters, consoles, manuals, comics, E.T. dolls, wooden E.T. cutouts and one automobile (Ernie Cline's DeLorean)! The other reason they came was to settle the truth of a long-standing urban legend, to see if the desert would yield a few copies (or a few million) of my infamous creation, the *E.T.* videogame.

It was a wild day in the desert. The excitement, the energy, the sand storm, the mayor, the anticipation, the sound of heavy machinery, cameras and boom mics everywhere you turn. It was pandemonium… and it was *awesome*! And all of this was happening because 27 July 1982 I answered "Yes".

The question (posed by Ray Kassar, Atari CEO) was this: "Howard, can you deliver a game for *E.T.* by September 1st?" There was no hesitation. It was a crazy notion but I knew I had to do it. And three decades later, here I stand in the middle of all this chaos, feeling incredibly honoured to have created the basis of this whole adventure. I'm so grateful I said "Yes" that day.

"PEOPLE WERE SCURRYING AROUND IN EVERY DIRECTION WITH FACEMASKS TO KEEP SAND AND DUST OUT OF THEIR LUNGS"



MYTHBUSTERS

Delving into the murky fog between fact and fiction, games™ takes a look at four other game legends

1. The Mystery of Polybius



A mysterious cabinet titled *Polybius* apparently appeared around Portland, Oregon in 1981, said to be part of a government experiment.

2. Dog Hunt



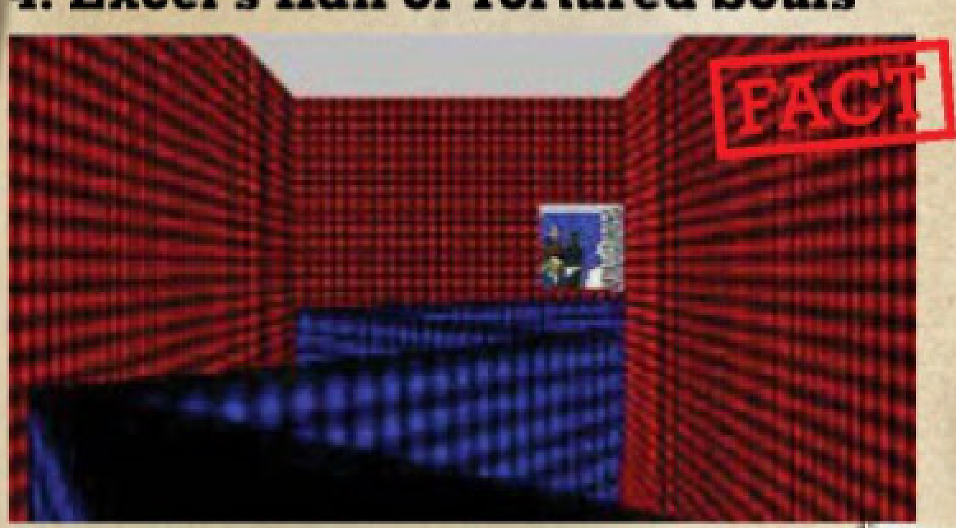
It might have started due to the fact that it existed in the arcade iteration, but NES gamers rumoured that you could shoot the dog in *Duck Hunt*.

3. Blowing Game Cartridges



The fact is that in blowing on the cartridge, you'd release tiny traces of saliva that, in the long run, would corrode away the pin connectors.

4. Excel's Hall of Tortured Souls



Buried inside your Excel 95 spreadsheet lurks a secret videogame titled 'The Hall Of Tortured Souls'.

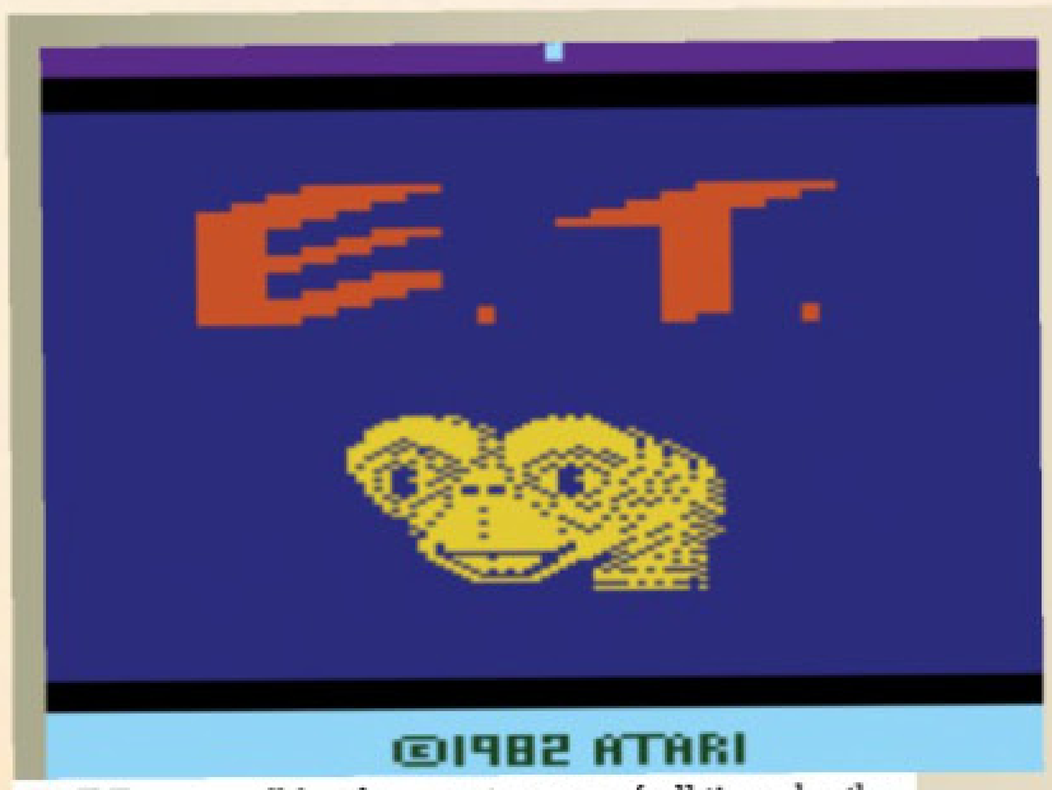
And that was no trivial "Yes." I had accepted the shortest schedule ever contemplated for a videogame, by more than 75%! By the time Atari and Steven Spielberg finished negotiations for the *E.T.* licence there were only five weeks left to create the game and still make the Christmas market (there's no point in doing a game if it misses that market). No one had ever done a game in less than five or six months and I had five weeks! From Tuesday, 27 July to Wednesday, 1 September. Okay, technically I had 36 days, but it was already dinner time on the first day.

So I started working and I kept working. I even had a development system moved into my home. The only time I was more than two minutes away from coding was driving between work and home. It was the most gruelling five weeks of my life, but I did it. What I did was produce the videogame many consider to be the all time worst. A game so bad it allegedly toppled the entire videogame industry in the mid Eighties. Well… you can't say my work hasn't had impact.

At one point I caught a moment between interviews. I'm standing at the centre of a hoard of fans and onlookers in this raging sand storm. Everyone is fixated on the groaning backhoe, relentlessly reaching deeper into the earth and returning with the next bucketful of antiquity… and that's when it hit me. I realized what I had actually accomplished in that five weeks. A game? Certainly. The worst of all time? Possibly. A Herculean task achieved? Absolutely.

But the most significant thing I did by making *E.T.* in five weeks was to create a piece of videogame history. Undeniably, inextricably, for better or worse till death do us part; *E.T.* and I were forever joined as a legend in the annals of gaming lore. I never really got it before. I certainly never considered this possibility while I was doing the game, and why would I? When I was doing *E.T.*, there was no videogame history. *E.T.* was just "my next game." You have to remember, videogames were considered by many to be a fad in the early Eighties, and the big market crash of 1983-84 seemed to prove that.

Now, with the benefit of hindsight and three decades, we know there *is* a history. Now there are "oldies" to revisit and explore. Back then they were all newies. We weren't making history or future nostalgia, so what were we doing? For my own part, the goal was clear. My mission was to relieve boredom, like the kind I experienced as a teen. I was a member of the last generation to grow up without videogames. Boredom was the bane of my adolescence and I understood the massive power of videogames to alleviate that problem. I wanted to spare others what I had endured. I wanted to prevent history from repeating itself.



■ *E.T.* may well be the worst game of all time, by the creator's admission.

"AS A PSYCHOTHERAPIST I KNOW ALL TOO WELL THAT NOTHING GETS RESOLVED IN THE PAST, ONLY THE PRESENT"

History. That's what this is all about. Reaching back to the past to answer questions, verify legends and settle disputes. As a psychotherapist I know all too well that nothing ever gets resolved in the past, only the present can provide that opportunity. And at present the dirt and the garbage and the stench kept coming up… but no games.

It's a well documented fact I have always doubted the truth of the myth. I never believed it because it couldn't possibly make sense. Why would a financially failing company spend a lot of time, effort and money to dispose of something presumably worthless? Of course, when I say this I'm forgetting one of the fundamental truths of that beautiful bygone era: Whenever you expect things to make sense, you are losing touch with Atari.

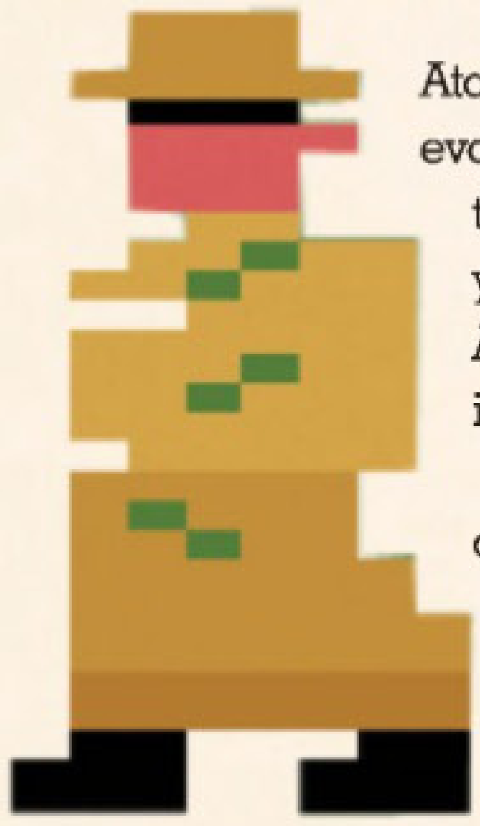
I was waiting for my order at a food truck (my blood sugar was starting to crash after six hours of all this) when suddenly a roar went up from the throng. A huge crush of people were pressing closer and closer to the fence around the excavation site. One of the production people ran over to me and said, "Come on, we gotta go!" Then they literally got behind me and started pushing very convincingly. Upon wedging through the crowd and reaching the fence, I saw Zak Penn (Hollywood luminary and director of the documentary driving this entire extravaganza) standing there with a microphone in one hand and what looked like a somewhat crushed but very discernible *E.T.* game box.

"We found it!" he proclaimed with great triumph in his voice. There was a visible relief in his demeanour as well, since his film is much better off with a strike than a miss. The games were there; I never thought they would be. I have never been so happy to be wrong!

It was a sign, an affirmation of just how crazy Atari was. But by the same token, that craziness made Atari an incredible place to work and an amazing place to be. Atari was a hotbed of abject excess that could never last and could never be replaced.







Atari (as I knew and loved it) evaporated in mid 1984 and soon thereafter I left. But where do you go after an experience like Atari? Apparently you wind up in a sand storm in the desert.

Everyone is cheering and shouting and the air is filled with excitement and wonder (and dust)! And here come the cameras and microphones in my face, "Hey Howard, what are you feeling now?"

And suddenly everything goes eerily quiet. I feel things welling up inside me. I realise the whole reason I made games was to entertain and amuse people. To give them a break from day-to-day life and to create wonderful moments. And on this day, in the middle of the New Mexico desert, my game is doing exactly that! A piece of work I did 32 years ago is still creating a special moment for hundreds of people. My heart swells and I am overwhelmed with gratitude. And I cry tears of joy.

I was seeing remnants of an old life, right at the time as starting a new one. Atari was by far the greatest job I had ever had, until now. As a psychotherapist, this is the first time in 30 years that my work is more rewarding and satisfying than what I experienced at Atari. I always believed I would get here someday, because I'm an optimist, but this was a long time coming. How interesting that this Atari news resurfaces precisely now, just as I'm hitting my stride in a bonus round of right time, right place in my life.

My musings continued as the heavy machinery droned on, delivering scoop after scoop of historic relics scattered amongst the useless waste. Fortunately there were several anthropologists on hand to clarify which was which. Life has a funny way of coming full circle. After 30 years the gaming industry is back to making simple games for smaller screens. I've come full circle too. Back then I catered to hungry technophiles by entertaining them. Now as The Silicon Valley Therapist I'm once again meeting their needs, but this time in a deeper, more meaningful way. My current life plan is aggressive, just like the development of *E.T.* But I do hope I get better reviews this time.

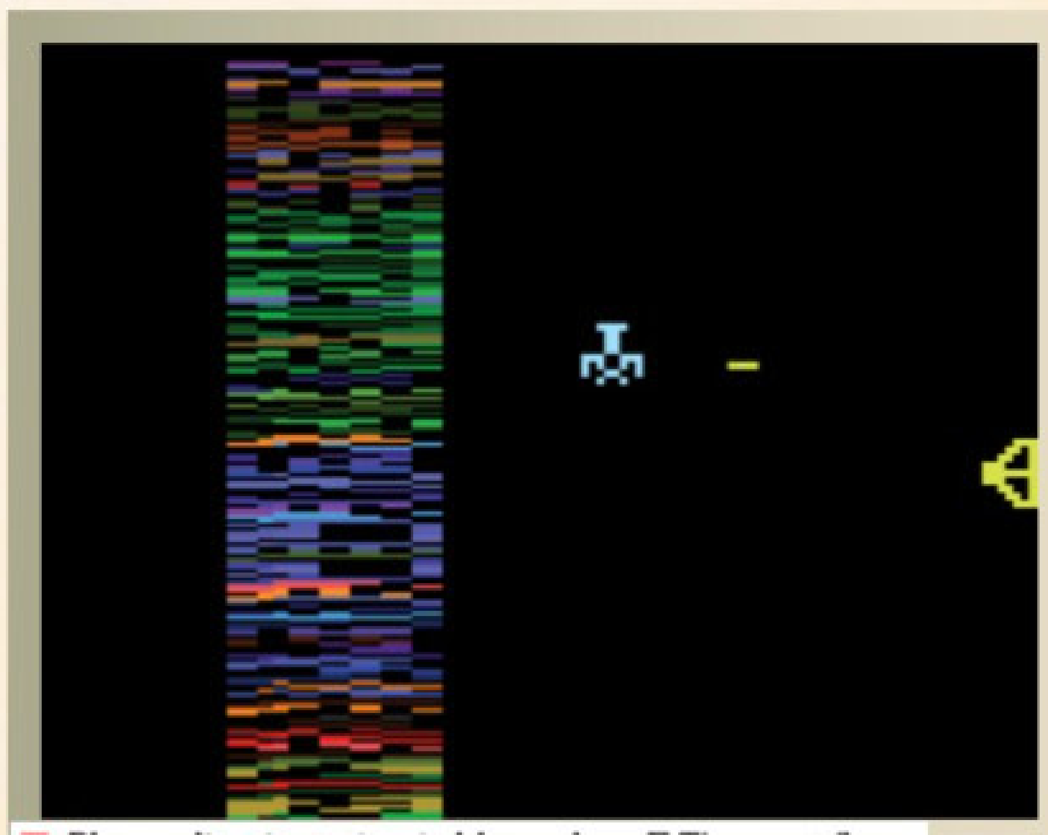
And speaking of reviews, I was asked about *NeoComputer*'s project to "fix the bugs" in E.T. The reporter seemed a tad sheepish when asking the question, but truthfully I am not uncomfortable acknowledging playability problems with my E.T. game. In other words, I am well grounded in reality. I have played the updated version and I believe it improves the game substantially. It eliminates the biggest problem with the game in my opinion: player disorientation. If I'd had another day or two perhaps I would have made those changes… but then again, if I had, we might not be talking about it right now.

In the end, the burial was real but it really wasn't about burying *E.T.* In fact, the majority of the salvaged bounty was composed of hit carts, top sellers like *Defender*, *Centipede* and *Yars' Revenge*. There were consoles and peripherals too. This was clearly a warehouse dump, not an *E.T.* graveyard. So maybe it didn't make sense to bury millions of *E.T.* games just to hide their corporate shame, after all. But then again, what sense does it make to create a legend around it?

After all the years of speculation, this much is true: I've got one game in the New York Museum of Modern Art and another in a hole in the New Mexico desert. I faced the unearthing of my past… and I totally dug it!



Even by 8-bit standards, the game comes across as incredibly basic, with parts of it even unfinished.



Player disorientation is blamed as *E.T.*'s worst flaw, and it's easy to see why…

"SUDDENLY, EVERYTHING GOES EERILY QUIET"



BEST INTRO

MEGA MAN 2

NES [CAPCOM] **1988**

OFTEN THE MOST memorable openings in videogames are the ones that display the most elaborate visuals, which is why contemporary games are often celebrated loudest – case in point: *BioShock*'s maiden descent into Rapture. But even within the limited capabilities of basic console hardware (in this case the NES) developers found increasingly distinctive ways to create dynamic visual moments for players to marvel at. *Mega Man 2* does just that with only a few lines of text, flawlessly setting the scene for the ensuing experience; the camera sweeps up a skyscraper as the music swells, revealing Mega Man standing proudly atop. It's one of the most rousing moments in the history of gaming, one that can't fail to make gamers ridiculously pumped-up about what lies ahead. As far as heroic entrances go, all other videogame icons should take note.



GAME CHANGERS

SUPER MARIO BROS.

Released: 13 September, 1985 (JP) **Publisher:** Nintendo **Developer:** Nintendo R&D4 **System:** NES/Famicom



The world record time for the completion of Super Mario Bros. was recently beaten: a dedicated gamer managed to finsh the game in just under five minutes!

The sequel to Mario Bros., Super Mario Bros. popularised the side-scrolling platformer and added multiplayer to what became Nintendo's flagship title

ORIGINATING AS A coin-operated game back in 1985, *Super Mario Bros.* eventually became synonymous with the NES – establishing itself as a killer app for the Eighties console. The platformer was a spiritual successor to *Mario Bros.* – a game that attracted a fair share of attention in its own right – but in adding the Super prefix (a trope that would come to define Nintendo sequels and spin-offs), the developer managed to create a game that would come to define the platform genre outright.

The game is not only a classic – generating a buzz on its Japanese and Western releases through, mostly, the rare gift of positive word of mouth – but it also stands up to the test of time. The game remains a relevant and valid example of platforming done well; *Super Mario Bros.* popularised the side-scrolling platformer, and the genre has since seen many contenders attempt to knock *Mario* off his pedestal atop the platforming throne. Few have come close, none have succeeded, and the superiority of *Super Mario Bros.* comes down to one aspect: its mechanics.

Oddly, in a world of moustachioed plumbers, lizard-dragons and Shy Guys, *Super Mario Bros.* is defined by its realistic mechanics. For an 8-bit game, the momentum and subtlety behind Mario and Luigi's movements was incredibly deft, operating on a system that you could understand from the first time you picked up the pad, yet would probably never master. The physics were analogous to real life; if you wanted to attempt a large jump, you'd have to get a running start. Conversely, if you started Mario off on a run (which was wonderfully animated with his stodgy little hands pumping up and down at his sides), you'd have to give him a margin of space to come to a stop in. Critics of the game called the mechanics slippery, but this didn't deter the fans – players who would stick with Mario and his bizarre world indefinitely – who fell in love with the peculiar momentum Mario popularised.

The bounciness of *Mario's* world also appealed to those first coming into gaming proper – jump on an enemy, and you'll have to fine-tune your landing.

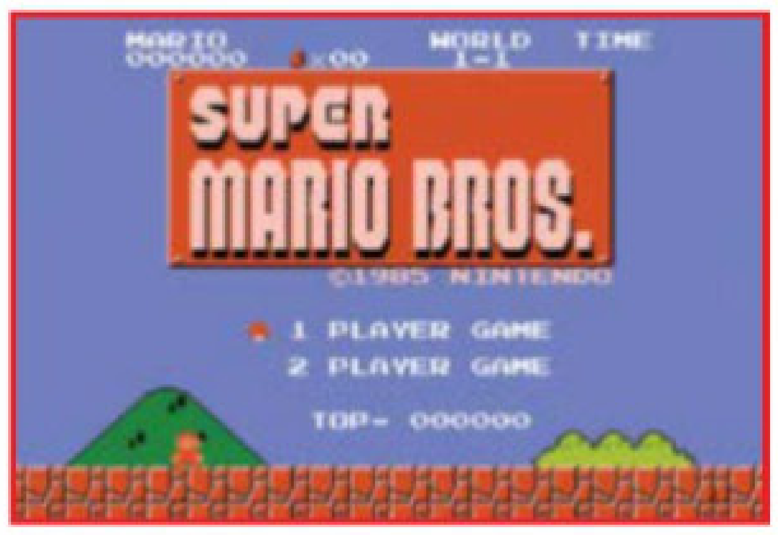
DISSECT MARIO

***SUPER MARIO BROS.* IS PROUDLY PARADED BY A SLEW OF DEVELOPERS AS A HUGE INFLUENCE IN BOTH THEIR LIVES AND THEIR WORK**



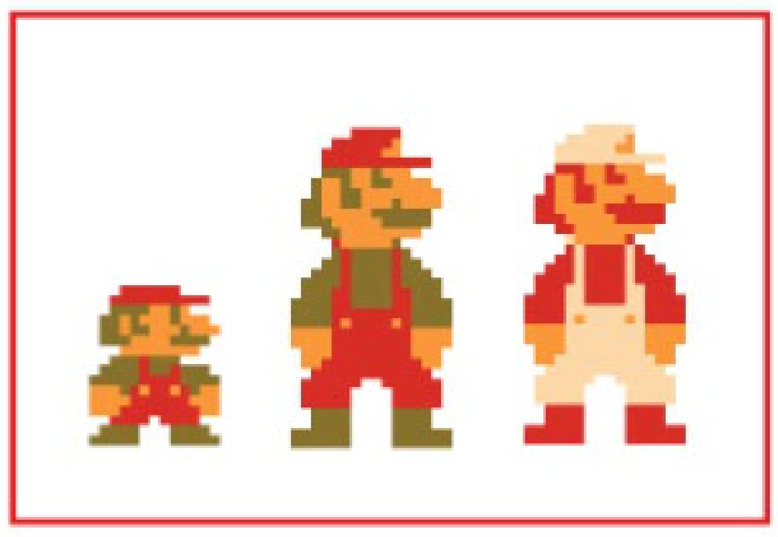
THE IMPENDING DEATH OF FAMICOM

★ Miyamoto was motivated to create a game that would be a respectable farewell to the NES cartridge system when Nintendo put forward the idea for a disk-based console to take its place. After talking about progressing Nintendo's 'athletic games' remit, the core idea for *Super Mario Bros.* was born.



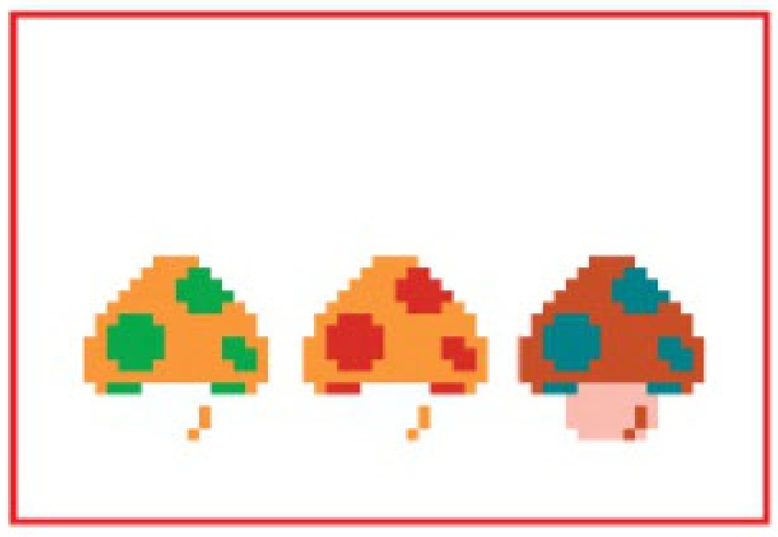
MARIO BROS.

★ Unsurprisingly, Miyamoto's first foray into the Mario world was more of a proof of concept than anything else – it was *Super Mario Bros.* that took the franchise into the mainstream. Before, Mario had to flip turtles before stomping on them – this was deemed illogical in the revision, hence the bounciness of the platformer we have now.



ACCIDENTS

★ The shifting size of Mario was never actually intentional – in the prototype stages of development, *Super Mario Bros.* only had 'small' Mario, but when the development team altered the size of the levels and Mario stayed the same (becoming 'big'), Miyamoto decided to make Mario 'big' through power-ups.



MAGIC MUSHROOMS

★ Yep. Once the size-changing mechanic was agreed upon, Miyamoto took his influence from folk tales that were based on villagers wandering into forests, eating 'magical mushrooms' and changing sizes – hence why Mario's world became known as Mushroom Kingdom. Who would've guessed it?

It wasn't a matter of simply killing your enemies; that was only half of the battle. The game took full advantage of this, introducing an eclectic cast of villains that took full advantage of the seemingly limited scope that Mario had in his movements. Some would require tackling from above, some avoiding altogether, some only vulnerable at certain times. The power-ups – hidden in boxes that could be completely missed, if you weren't attentive enough – were sparse enough to keep the game challenging, but occurred often enough to always be *fun*, always *worth getting*. The game's level of challenge was perfectly attuned, suitable for all ages and never too easy or too hard for any party to take issue with: the bosses, too, each required dexterity and reflexes to overcome, pushing the simple A, B, and D-pad of the NES to its feasible limit without ever becoming pad-breakingly frustrating.

■■■ The enemies were complemented with level design that made the most of the tight physics, too. The need to constantly alter your vertical position after jumping was highlighted with staggered overground worlds that had high and wide platforms, forming paths into the clouds that felt wondrous and unique. The need to tune your position on-screen as you fell, and delicately press 'Jump' for differential heights, was played upon in the tighter, much more claustrophobic underground sections, too.

Both overground and underground sections were augmented by destructible environments that could throw a curve ball into the mix at any time, plopping you back on a lower level and interrupting your masterplan for completing the level in record time. On top of that, there was even a slew of secret levels tucked into various nooks and crannies of the various worlds, wresting you out of your comfort zone and throwing you into a bonus round of whacked-out weirdness. It was all part of the formula that would come to define *Mario* and his erstwhile franchise, and it was all operating at 100 per cent efficiency from the start.

Everything you'll play in a platforming game of any type nowadays inevitably owes a nod to *Super Mario Bros.*, and it's awe-inspiring to think about just how solidly Nintendo's seminal side-scroller established the genre.

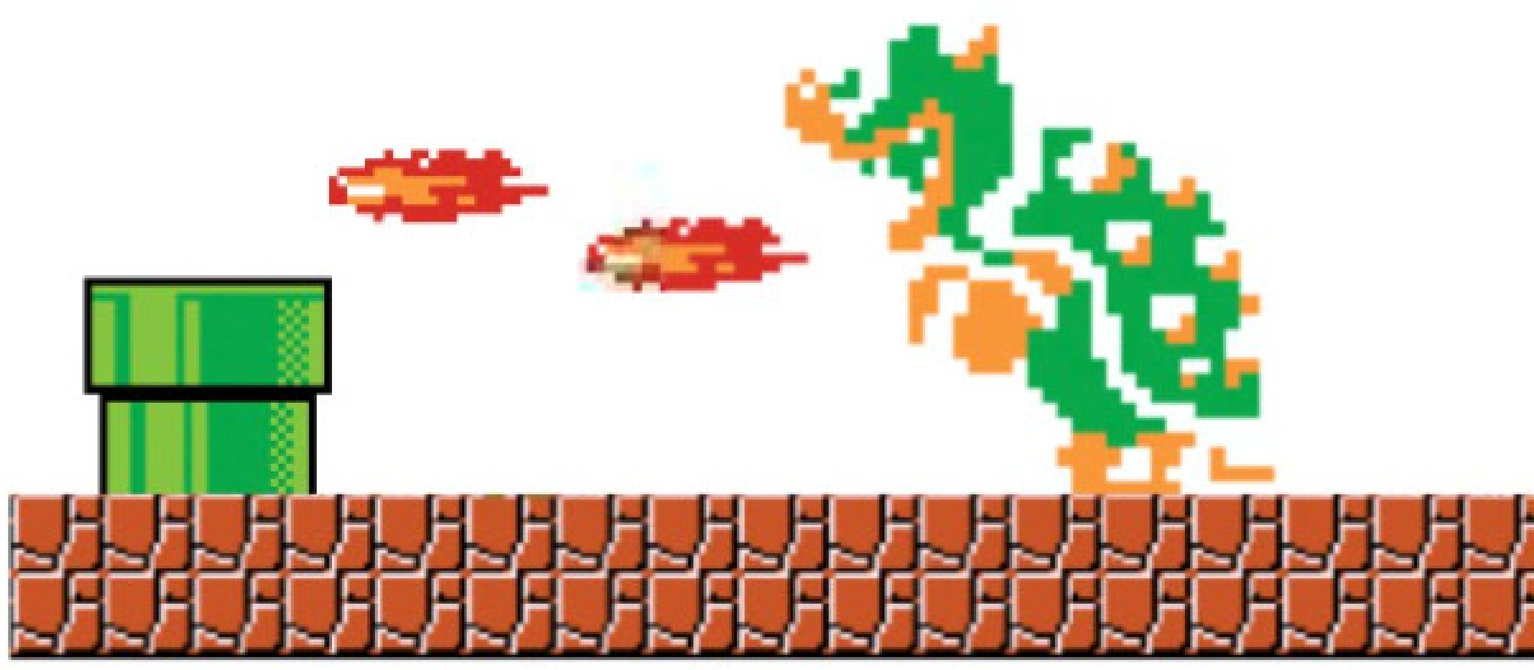
SMB OPENED UP A WHOLE REALM OF POSSIBILITIES FOR INTERESTING AND DIVERSE MOVE-SET DESIGNS

KEY FACTS

■ *Super Mario Bros.* is the second best-selling game of all time, with a 40.24 million copies sold record – behind *Wii Sports*' ridiculous 82.45 million sales. (The fact the top two spots are held by Nintendo is telling.)

■ The score for *Super Mario Bros.* was originally a lot slower, but composer Koji Kondo upped the tempo of the six featured tracks when he saw players testing the game to match the quick pace of play

■ The original pitch for the game included a shoot-'em-up stage where Mario would fire bullets at enemies from cloud platforms



GAME CHANGERS

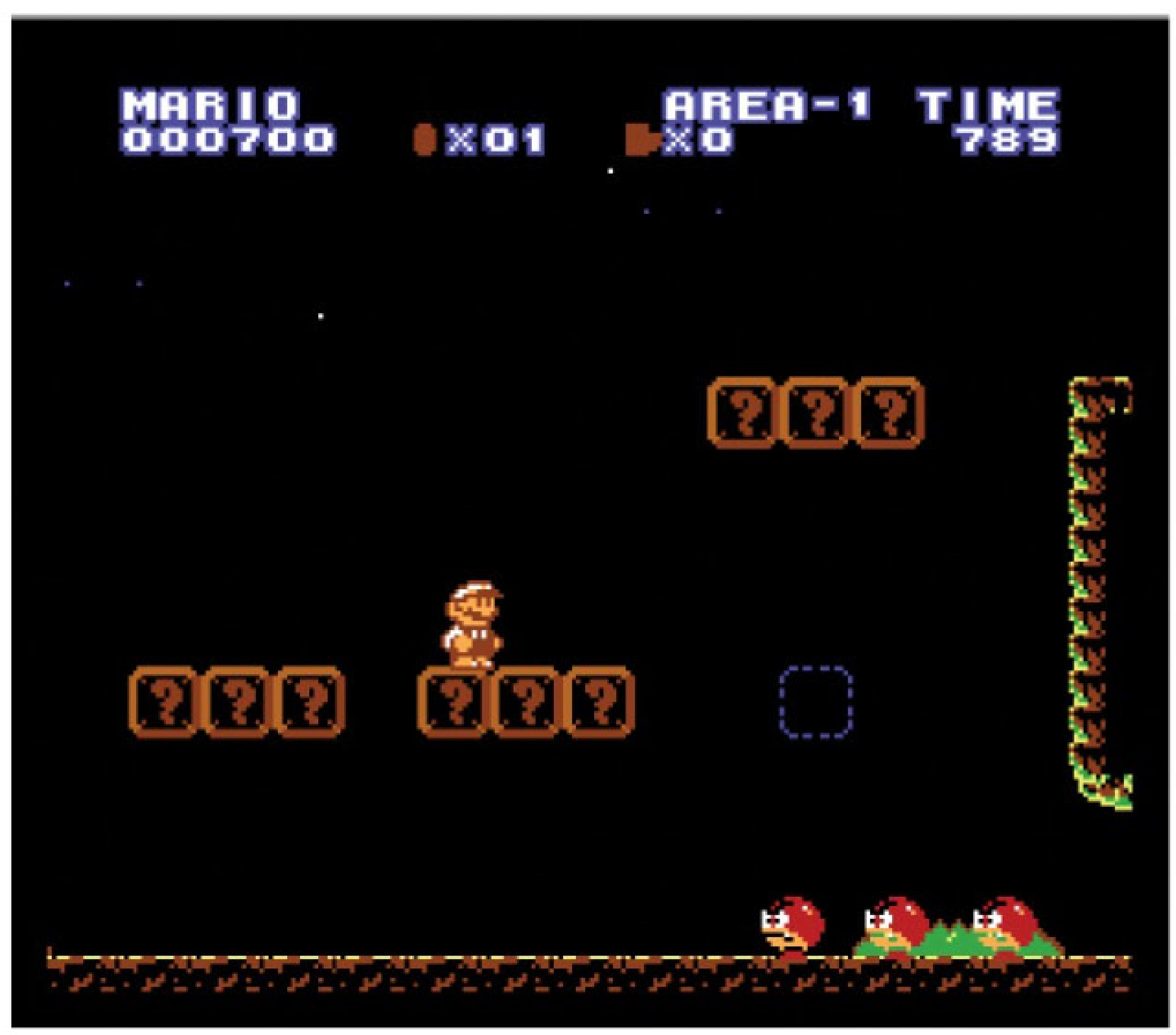
THE 8 BEST SUPER MARIO BROS. HACKS

THE GREAT THING ABOUT GAMES AS SIMPLY CONSTRUCTED AS SUPER MARIO BROS. IS THAT THEY ARE EASIER TO REVERSE ENGINEER THAN THEIR MODERN-DAY COUNTERPARTS. THIS LEADS TO SOME GREAT CUSTOM GAMES SEEPING INTO THE PUBLIC DOMAIN – SUPER MARIO BROS. IS FAMOUS FOR HAVING A VAST ARRAY OF HACKED VERSIONS, SO WE COMPILED OUR FAVOURITES FOR YOUR READING PLEASURE



SUPER MARIO FRUSTRATION

■ A MINEFIELD OF invisible blocks and obstacles impede your progress through every single level of this fiendish re-creation of *Super Mario Bros.* We played a few levels of it, and will happily say it's harder than *Dark Souls.* If you don't believe us, take the challenge yourself – you'll soon understand why we said it.



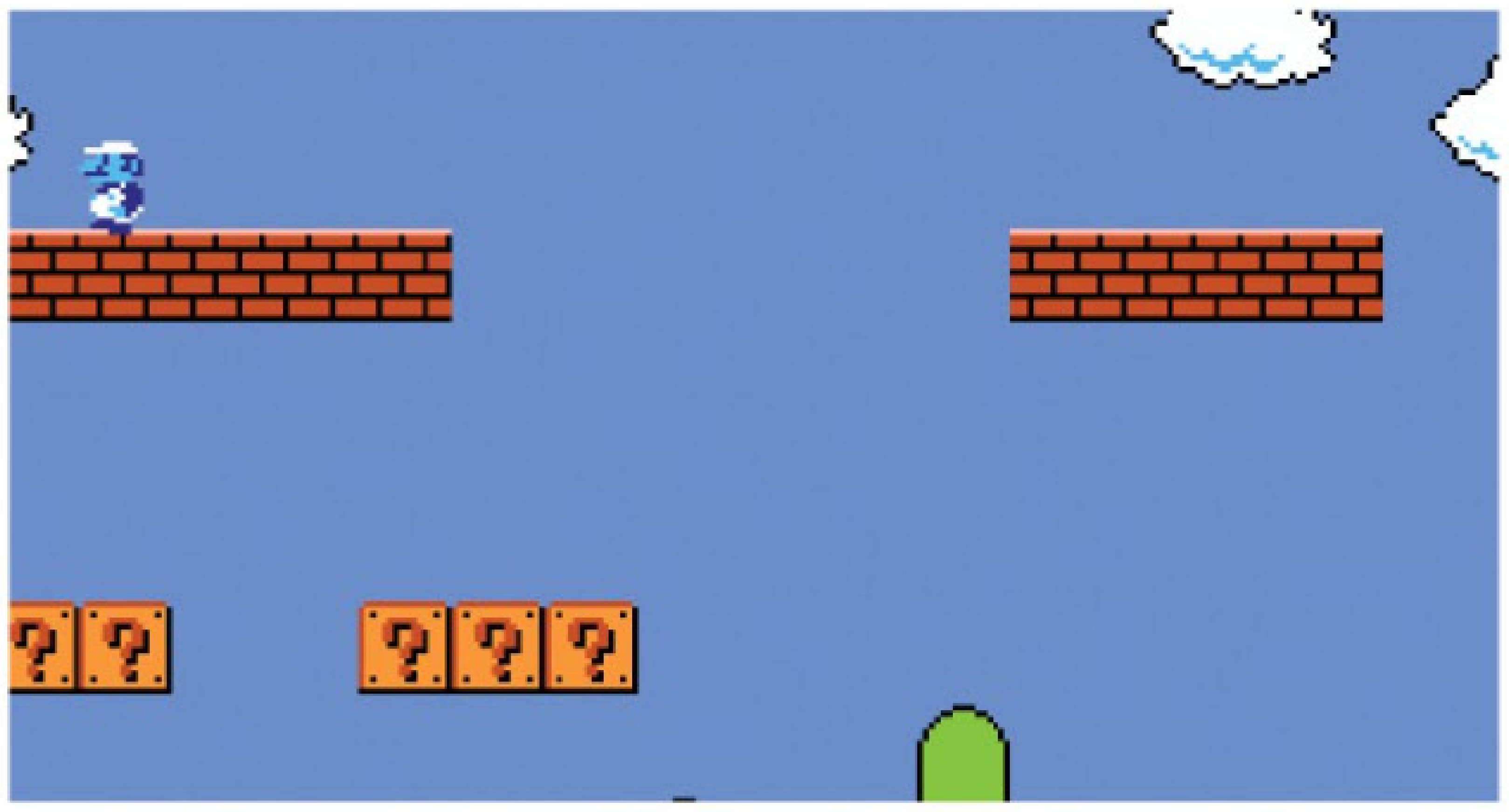
EXTRA MARIO BROS

■ A HACK THAT adds new maps, new graphics, new enemies and new power-ups to the game, *Extra Mario Bros.* sometimes doesn't hit the *Mario* template one-for-one, but it's worth playing through just to get to the final boss battle. It's quite a stretch from what you'll be used to seeing in *Mario* games, but it's worth a play.



SUPER MUSHROOM

■ REPLACING MARIO WITH Toad, *Super Mushroom* sees power-ups replaced with enemies, new sound effects added for jumping and some reworked graphics and textures. The game is apparently at a '99.9%' difficulty level and is considered one of the hardest *SMB* hacks made.



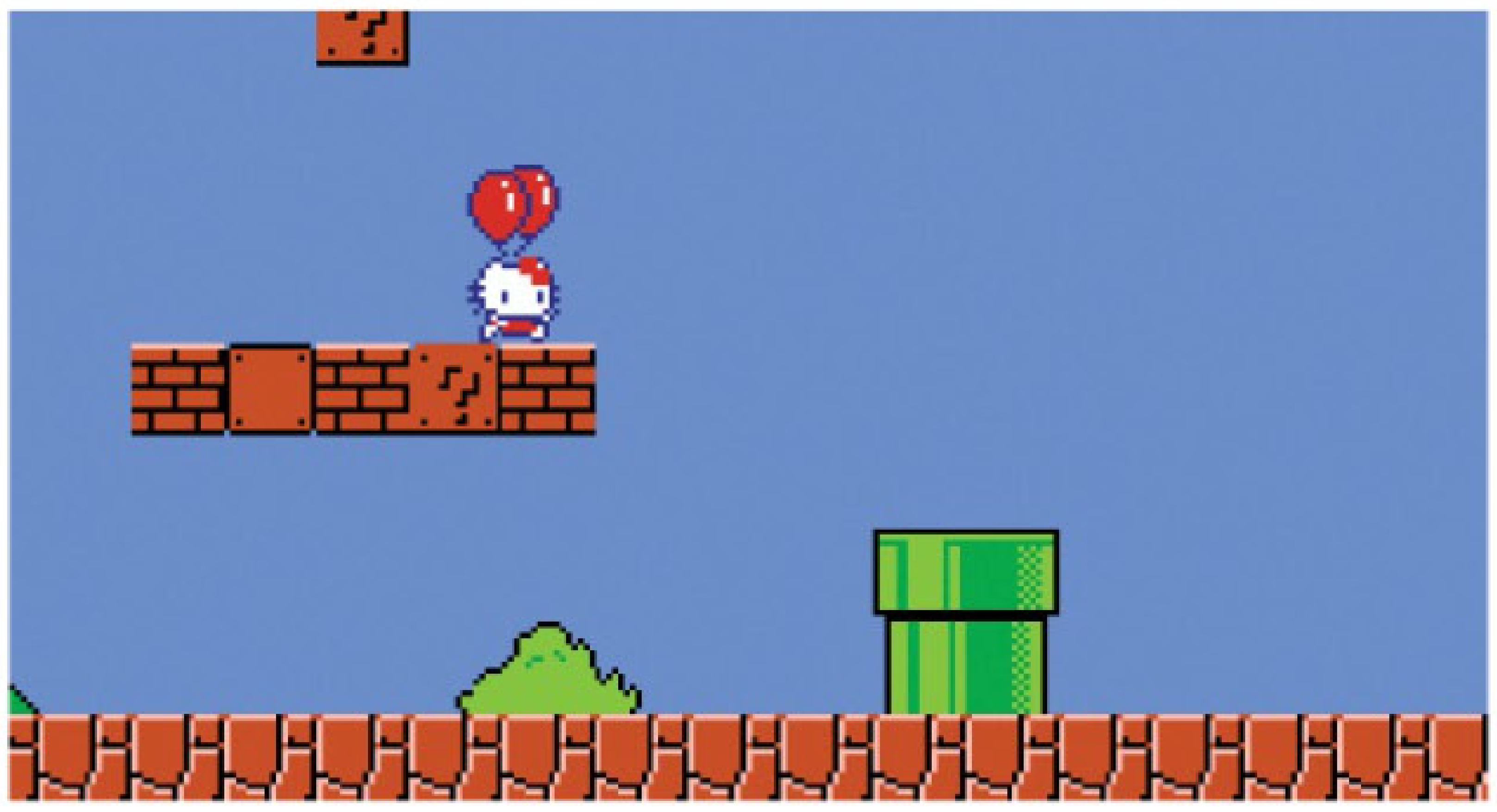
SUPREME ICE BROS.

■ A HACK THAT sees the fire power-up of Mario's replaced with an ice-based attack, *Supreme Ice Bros.* also replaces Goombas with ninjas (who receive a speed boost), sees Bowser become the devil, hidden paths in pre-existing levels and completely remade music. It's stupidly hard, too.



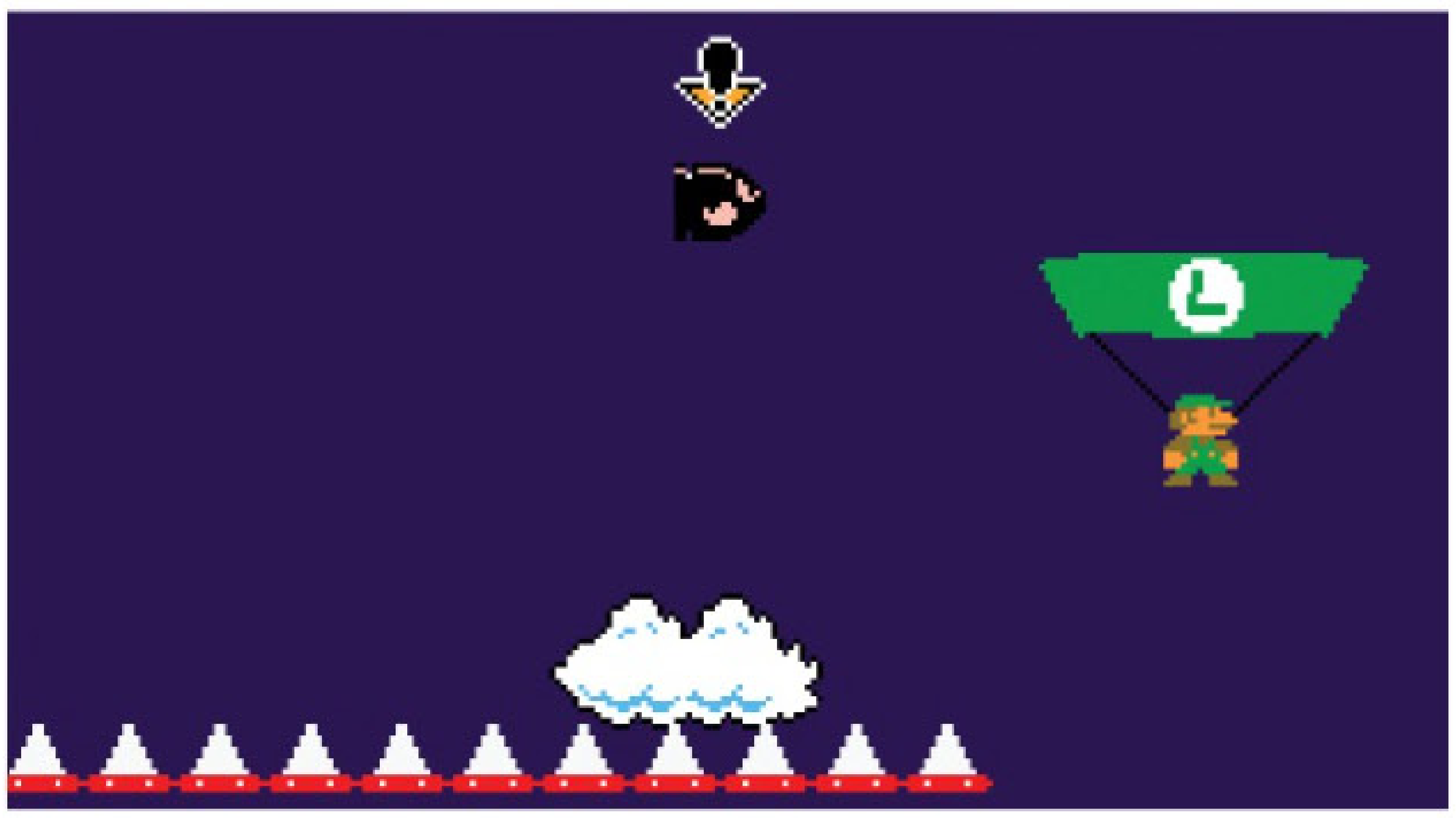
THE NEW STRANGE MARIO BROS.

■ INTENTIONALLY GLITCHY AND oddly designed levels are the trademark of *The New Strange Mario Bros.*, a game that gets harder as it goes on. Infamous for incorporating new graphics that messed around with how the physics of the games worked, *The New Strange Mario Bros.* really was the experience it promised



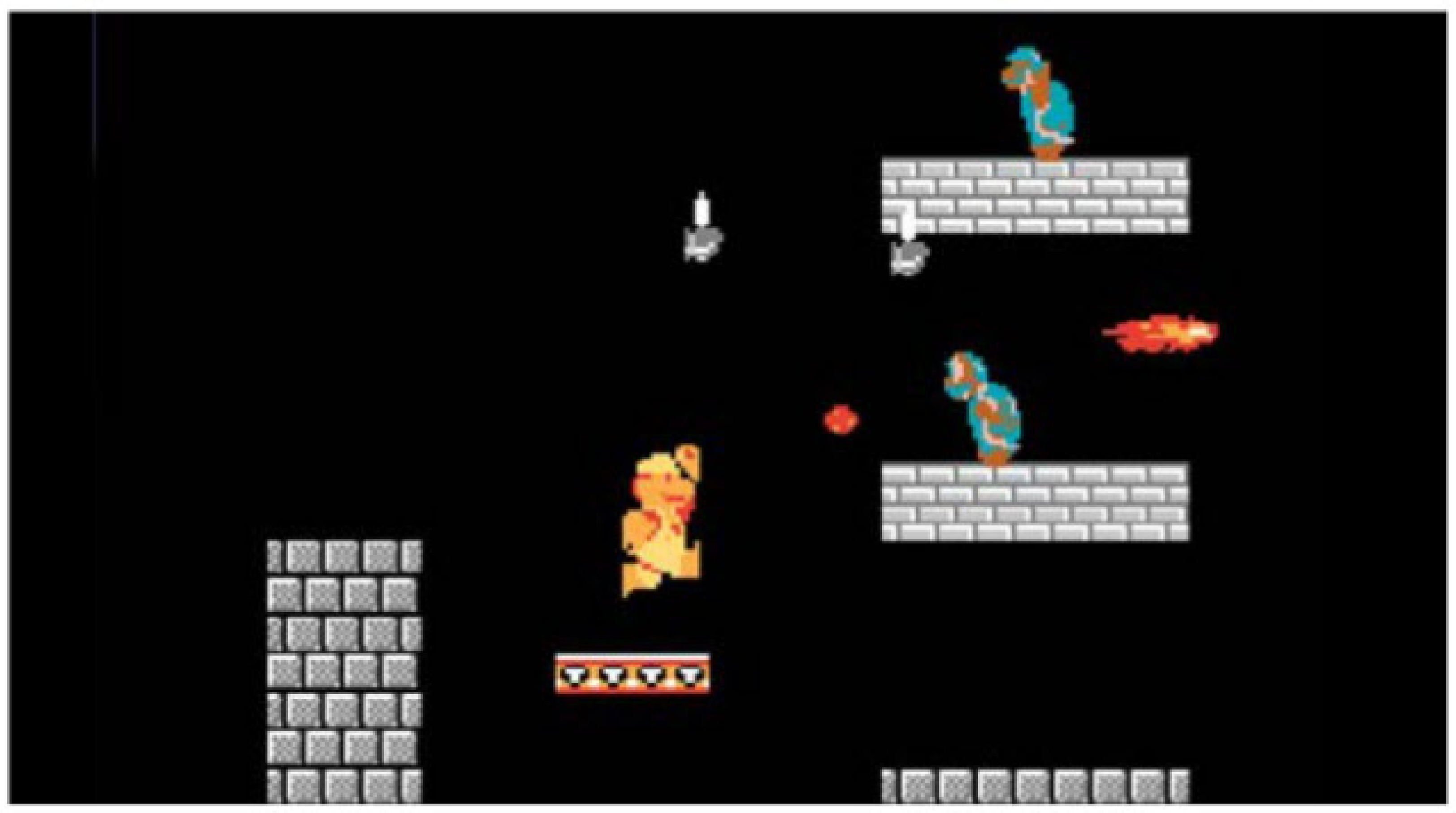
HELLO KITTY IN THE MUSHROOM KINGDOM

■ THIS BIZARRE HACK takes the sprites from the Japanese NES game *Hello Kitty World* and uses them to replace the eponymous *Bros.* of the original title. Even coming with its own story, the hack is the result of a lot of effort, and actually a surprisingly good game.



LUIGI'S FIRST QUEST: THE SEARCH FOR MARIO

■ ROLES HAVE BEEN reversed, and it's Luigi's time to shine in this hack that places the lankier, greener brother in the shoes of his stodgy younger brother. The hack includes a slew of new levels that take advantage of Luigi's higher jumping prowess.



JOE & MOE PIZZA DELIVERY

■ PROBABLY RIFFING ON the inherent stereotype-bashing inherent to Mario, *Joe & Moe* replaces the majority of the graphics in *Super Mario Bros.* and replaces them with the creator's own take on the Mushroom Kingdom. The levels have been redesigned, too, but not to a particularly high standard.



THE RETRO GUIDE TO… SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Sega's mascot shows no sign of slowing down after more than two decades on the run, with new games and a fifth TV series on the way. What better way to prepare than to revisit the highs and lows of Sonic's gaming career?

WITH OVER 50 videogames, multiple TV shows and a comic series that has run for over two decades, Sonic is easily one of the most recognisable characters in videogames. Unlike peers Pac-Man and Mario, Sonic was consciously designed as the face of his company, originating as Naoto Oshima's winning entry in a company-wide competition to design a new mascot.

With the aid of Yuji Naka's programming talents and Hirokazu Yasuhara's game design, the blue hedgehog's debut game hit big and established Sega as a force to be reckoned with.

This year sees Sonic reinvented again with a new design unveiled for *Sonic Boom*, a project that includes two new games and a fifth TV series. With details of the games now emerging, the time is right to examine Sonic's back catalogue and see how he has triumphed – and where he has tripped up.



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 1991

SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE

The only thing that time has taken from Sonic's debut is impact, as every gamer is now familiar with the rolling hills and loops of the Green Hill Zone. The striking thing about Sonic's first platform adventure is that it contains some very slow stages, with the deliberate pace of Marble Zone and Labyrinth Zone contrasting with Sonic's reputation as a speedy critter. Speed is very much a privilege in this game, with players rewarded for memorising routes with increasingly smooth runs. It's an easy game that lacks some now-standard series features, but this is indisputably a landmark platformer.

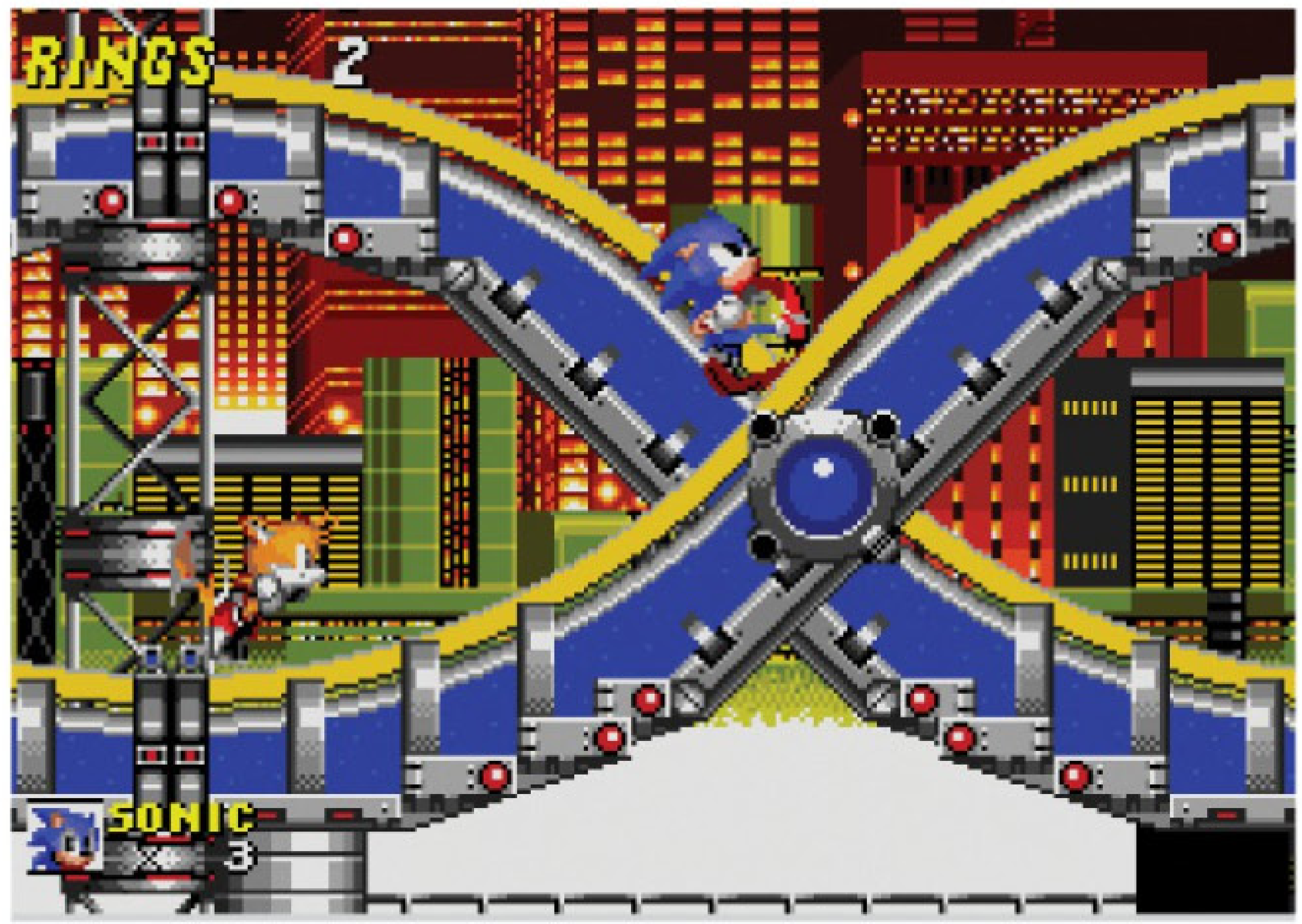




SONIC ERASER 1991

SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE

Sonic's first ever spin-off game is the first in a long lineage of titles. Unfortunately, it is a largely unremarkable puzzle game, notable mostly for its obscurity. *Sonic Eraser* was originally made available for download via the Japan-only Mega Drive Modem that utilised the Meganet service introduced by Sega in 1990. This game spent over a decade seemingly consigned to history as a long-forgotten relic until eventually resurfacing via B-Club, a retro download service that Sega operated in Japan.



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2 1992

SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE

Produced in the USA by a mixed team of Japanese and American staff, *Sonic 2* had a troubled development phase that resulted in an unusually high number of abandoned concepts. However, none of that was evident when the game launched to incredible fanfare in November 1992. Emphasising the strong points of the original game, *Sonic 2* included a greater number of stages and lifted Sonic's speed cap. It also introduced a number of recurring elements in the series, including the invincible Super Sonic, the instant acceleration Spin Dash technique and the first of Sonic's many friends, Tails. As well as following Sonic around stages and ruining your chances of beating the special stages, the flying fox competed against Sonic in the split-screen multiplayer mode.

"EVERY GAMER IS NOW FAMILIAR WITH THE ROLLING HILLS AND LOOPS OF THE GREEN HILL ZONE"



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2 1992

SYSTEM: MASTER SYSTEM, GAME GEAR

While Sonic's first 8-bit outing was loosely based on the Mega Drive original, *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* is a wholly different game to its 16-bit counterpart. Following Sonic's quest to rescue a kidnapped Tails, the game introduced vehicles to the series, including mine carts and hang gliders and made for another fine outing. Unfortunately, the smaller display of the Game Gear version greatly increases the difficulty of certain sections – most infamously the first boss, who represents a much more trivial obstacle on the Master System version of this sequel.



SEGASONIC THE HEDGEHOG 1993

SYSTEM: ARCADE

■ For Sonic's arcade debut, Sega took the unusual step of removing him from his usual side-scrolling environment and sticking him in a trackball-controlled isometric platformer. That wasn't the only change, as an energy bar replaced Sonic's traditional system of carrying rings to ensure his safety. Sonic gained some new mates in Mighty and Ray, who joined in for three-player action. While this game has been sighted in the UK and elsewhere, it isn't known to have been officially released outside of Japan – an odd move, considering the massive global popularity of the character at the time.



SONIC CD 1993

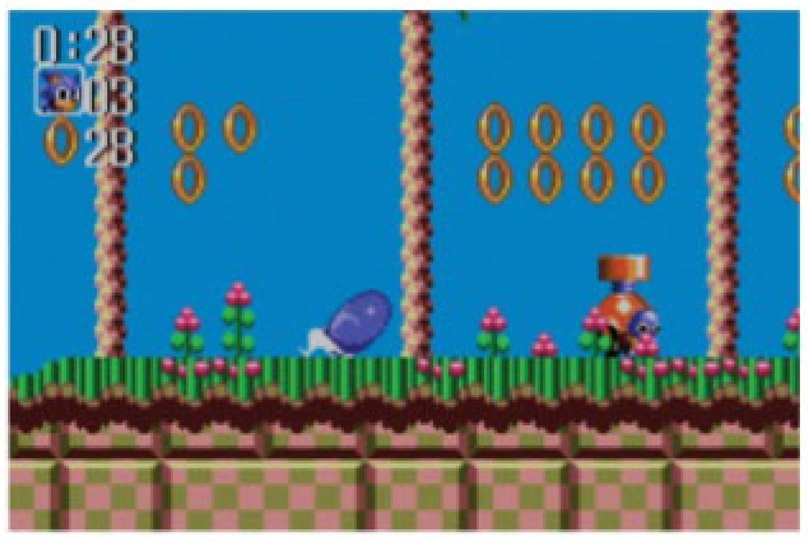
SYSTEM: MEGA-CD

■ Sonic's only outing on Sega's expensive add-on was an unusual affair, with character designer Naoto Oshima taking the reigns as game director. Sonic was able to travel back and forth in time during each stage in an attempt to fix the future, experiencing different level layouts as a result. This necessitated a different style of stage design compared to Sonic's other 2D platformers, as he is expected to backtrack often and explore each stage thoroughly. An impressive 3D-style special stage and a CD soundtrack capped off the package, serving to show off the advantages of the format.

SONIC CHAOS 1993

SYSTEM: MASTER SYSTEM, GAME GEAR

■ Having done a good job with the 8-bit version of *Sonic 2*, developer Aspect was tasked with creating an exclusive platformer for Sega's low-end formats. *Sonic Chaos* introduces Tails to the 8-bit consoles and gives Sonic some nifty new power-ups including spring shoes and rocket shoes, but exhibits a noticeably uneven difficulty level, with regular stages being far too easy and special stages often rather tough.

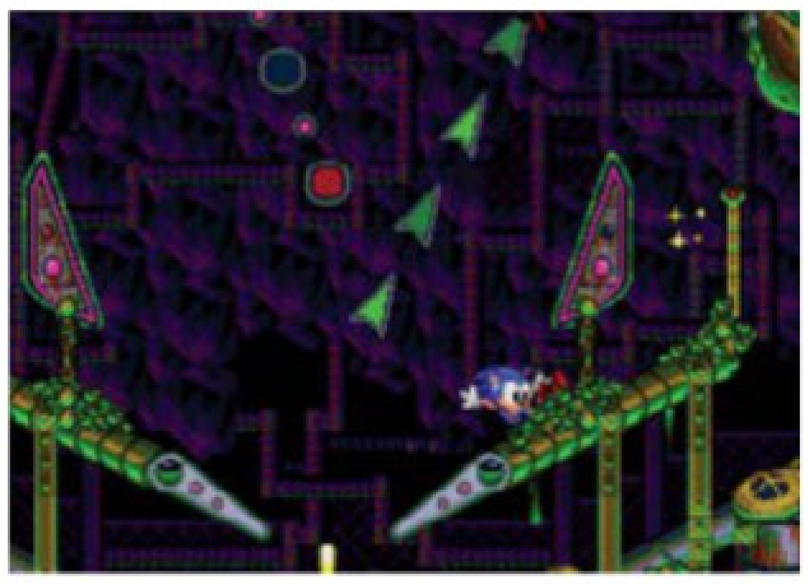




SONIC SPINBALL 1993

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

■ *Sonic Spinball* was the first of Sonic's major spin-off outings, released to cover the lack of a Mega Drive platformer for the 1993 holiday season. Inspired by the pinball action of *Sonic 2*'s Casino Night Zone, the game expanded on the pinball formula with large multi-table environments and boss battles. Although it only contains four stages, they're relatively tough. *Sonic Spinball* is a perfectly serviceable game, but nothing incredible.



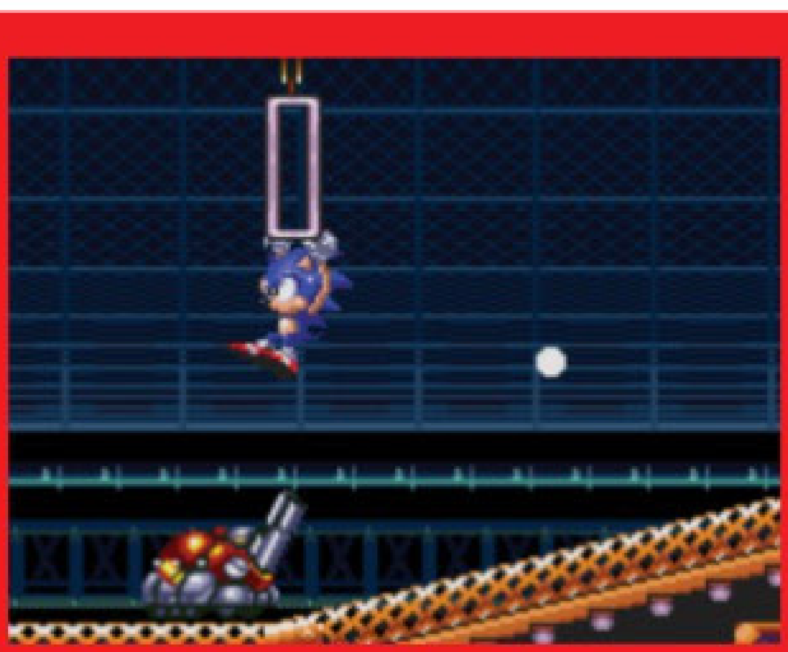
SONIC 3 1994

SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE

■ Another game, another new character – and this time it's a foe in the form of Knuckles, a hot-tempered echidna. Beyond that, the third of Sonic's Mega Drive platformers plays it safe, with stages that are larger but less numerous than those in *Sonic 2*. Bosses now appear at the end of all stages, too. The inclusion of a save game feature was criticised for making the game too easy, especially given its relatively short length, but it's another high quality platform game.







SONIC & KNUCKLES 1994

SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE

■ Released just eight months after *Sonic 3*, *Sonic & Knuckles* sees the two titular rivals joining forces, as Knuckles realises that Robotnik is a tad evil and joins the playable cast. The game's cartridge includes another cartridge slot, allowing players to plug other games into the top of the cartridge. Plugging in *Sonic 2* makes Knuckles available in the older game, but connecting to *Sonic 3* is the far more enticing prospect as *Sonic & Knuckles* is essentially the second part of that game. Combined, they become one large adventure that stands as the best of Sonic's 2D outings.

SONIC DRIFT 2 1995

SYSTEM: GAME GEAR

■ The first *Sonic Drift* was a racing spin-off only released in Japan, but the sequel managed to gain a European release. It's tempting, as a racing game with power-ups, to compare it to *Mario Kart*, but it feels far closer to 8-bit conversions of *OutRun* and *Super Monaco GP* due to the limitations of the platform.





SONIC CHAMPIONSHIP 1996

SYSTEM: ARCADE

Sega's legendary AM2 team took the helm for this arcade release, that along with *Virtua Fighter Kids* represented a drive to make fighting games more appealing to younger players. Based on the *Fighting Vipers* engine, it's a frantic fighter that isn't particularly deep. New characters include Bark, a polar bear, and Bean, a bomb-throwing duck whose design harks back to Sega's cutesy beat-'em-up *Dynamite Dux*. A Sonic-style version of *Fighting Vipers'* Honey was also designed but dropped, finally appearing in the game's PSN/XBLA release.



SONIC R 1997

SYSTEM: SATURN, PC

Traveller's Tales returned for the Saturn's only exclusive *Sonic* game, an on-foot racing spin-off. The game's five tracks include a variety of hidden items that can only be discovered by exploring the massive number of additional routes available. *Sonic R* was a technical showcase for the Saturn, displaying graphical tricks like transparency that had been thought impossible on the hardware.



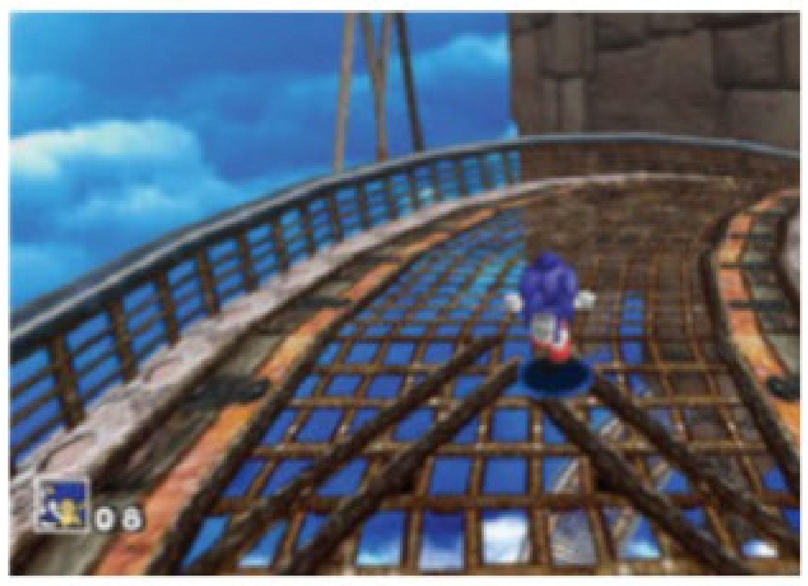


SONIC SHUFFLE 2000

SYSTEM: DREAMCAST

Released in the wake of Nintendo's popular *Mario Party*, *Sonic Shuffle* is a similar compilation of mini-games that featured cel-shaded graphics, then in vogue thanks to *Jet Set Radio*. It's another spin-off that fails to hit the mark though, thanks to long load times and AI opponents that blatantly cheat.





SONIC ADVENTURE 1998

SYSTEM: SATURN, PC

Originally conceived as a Saturn game, *Sonic Adventure's* development switched to the Dreamcast as the fading fortunes of Sega's black box became apparent. Sonic's first 3D platform game is the first to prominently feature his friends – all six characters have different play styles ranging from item-hunting to fishing, and their stories must be played to reach the game's true ending. The game also added the popular Chao-raising mini-game, in which players could raise a virtual pet on the Dreamcast and via the system's Visual Memory handheld console/memory card hybrid. While *Sonic Adventure* was well received at the time, selling over a million copies and later earning a GameCube port, playing it today reveals a wayward camera and some rather linear stage designs.



SONIC 3D: FLICKIES' ISLAND 1996

SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, SATURN

Sonic's Mega Drive swansong was an isometric platformer developed by Traveller's Tales that employed pre-rendered CGI sprites – a style that had been popularised by Nintendo's *Donkey Kong Country* a couple of years prior. Sonic was tasked with rescuing Flickies and leading them to various exits, a gameplay mechanic borrowed from Sega's 1984 arcade release *Flicky*. The Saturn release was a late replacement for the cancelled *Sonic X-Treme*, and sports improved visuals as well as a brand new polygonal special stage designed by Sonic Team.





SONIC POCKET ADVENTURE 1999

SYSTEM: NEO GEO POCKET COLOR

While this game wasn't the blue hedgehog's first appearance on a non-Sega console – the atrocious Tiger Game.com version of *Sonic Jam* takes that title, unfortunately – *Sonic Pocket Adventure* is an excellent 'greatest hits' remix of the Mega Drive games. The game, developed by Sonic Team and SNK, was released exclusively for the handheld Neo Geo Pocket Color. It includes hidden puzzle pieces in every stage, encouraging exploration and repeat play.



SONIC ADVENTURE 2 2001

SYSTEM: DREAMCAST, GAMECUBE

Launched exactly ten years after the first game, *Sonic Adventure 2* would be the mascot's last outing on a Sega console. Reprising the platform, shooting and item-hunting gameplay styles from *Sonic Adventure*, the game allowed you to play as either the heroic trio of Sonic, Tails and Knuckles or the dark side, consisting of Robotnik and two newcomers, Rouge and the much-maligned Shadow. It's a big graphical upgrade over its predecessor and the platforming stages are improved, but bizarre design choices mess up the shooting and item-hunting stages, resulting in an uneven game that offers both fun and frustration in equal measure.



SONIC ADVANCE 2001

SYSTEM: GAME BOY ADVANCE, N-GAGE

■ The first *Sonic* game to be developed primarily for a Nintendo console is a pretty straightforward 2D platformer that is much like the Mega Drive games, right down to the ability to have Tails follow Sonic with a cheat code. Grind rails are the main new addition, carried over from *Sonic Adventure 2*. This game also marks the first involvement of Dimps, the development team responsible for most new 2D and handheld *Sonic* games in recent years.

"SONIC HEROES SHOWS THE SERIES BEGINNING TO FALTER"



SONIC HEROES 2003

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

■ *Sonic Heroes* shows the series beginning to falter. The idea of controlling teams that specialise in speed, power and flight is solid, and the game ditches Dreamcast-era inclusions such as Chao-raising and includes special stages inspired by the Mega Drive games. However, technical issues such as a poor camera mar the experience, with the PS2 version suffering the worst due to additional glitches and a lower frame rate. The 12 characters also highlighted the abundance being introduced to the series.



SONIC RUSH 2005

SYSTEM: DS

■ Where Sonic struggled with the crossover to 3D, he was flourishing in 2D – after a few years of dodgy spin-offs and main series missteps, *Sonic Rush* was a critical success. Having refined a heavily speed-focused style of 2D platforming on the Game Boy Advance, Dimps placed that action into new tall stages that took place across both screens of the DS, with Sonic now able to charge through enemies at top speed with the new boost move – just as long as he could maintain a combo.

SONIC RIDERS 2006

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

■ The third distinct racing spin-off branch of the *Sonic* series puts the blue hedgehog and chums on hoverboards. Characters are able to use different shortcuts based on their own attributes, which is a nice idea. The game is never anything beyond passable, but has somehow earned itself two sequels, including one for Kinect.



THE B TEAM

When Sonic's friends took centre stage...



DR ROBOTNIK'S MEAN BEAN MACHINE 1993

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

■ The re-skinning of Japanese puzzle games was a common practice during the Nineties, with *Puyo Puyo* serving as the donor here, inspiring games such as *Tetris Attack* and *Kirby's Ghost Trap*. Unusually, it uses character designs from the *Adventures Of Sonic The Hedgehog* cartoon, including the robotic henchmen Scratch, Grounder and Coconuts.



TAILS AND THE MUSIC MAKER 1994

SYSTEM: PICO

■ Tails' first star turn of the *Sonic* series comes from an unusual source, a Western-developed game for Sega's Pico, an edutainment console that enjoyed a long life in Japan but failed to make a significant impact anywhere else in the world. *Tails And The Music Maker* aims to teach children about music, including scales, tempo, rhythm and instrument identification.



KNUCKLES' CHAOTIX 1995

SYSTEM: 32X

■ Knuckles was thrust into the starring role in a rather divisive game, the only 32X release in the series. Playing much like a regular *Sonic* platformer, the game's gimmick sees two characters attached by rings, with an elastic effect causing them to ping about the screen together.



TAILS' SKYPATROL 1995

SYSTEM: GAME GEAR



This Japan-only release is a pseudo-shoot-'em-up, that sees Tails taking on the villain Witchcart in a plane. It's extremely difficult to the point of being off-putting, despite looking like it's for kids. Recent compilations have made the game easier to acquire for non-Japanese players, though only masochists will be interested.



TAILS ADVENTURES 1995

SYSTEM: GAME GEAR

Tails' last star turn is a more traditional platform game, that leaves behind the high-speed action of regular *Sonic* games and introduces more puzzle-based gameplay. Tails has all kinds of items at his disposal, including bombs, a hammer and a remote controlled robot. Unexpectedly, this one's a good game.



SHADOW THE HEDGEHOG 2005

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

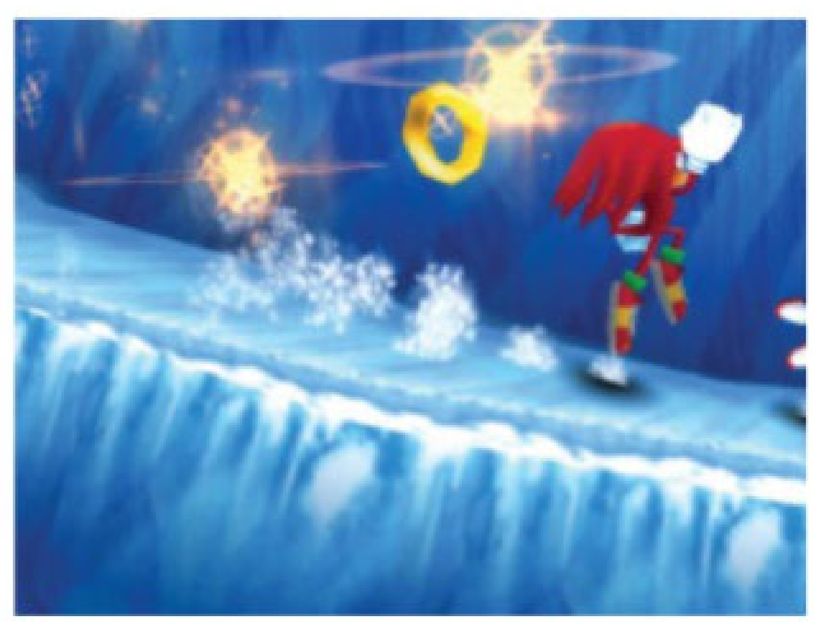
Shadow's only starring role adds weapons and vehicles to the *Sonic Adventure* formula, as well as a morality system and branching progression. The creative decision to take the series in a 'mature' direction was ill-advised and the game was technically inept, making this a high-profile failure that is best forgotten.



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2006

SYSTEM: XBOX 360, PLAYSTATION 3

Easily the nadir of Sonic's long history, this game does nearly everything wrong. Sonic continues the 3D platforming style of *Sonic Adventure*, Shadow gets the gunplay and vehicle usage of his own spin-off game, and new boy Silver is a slow character who uses telekinesis to manipulate objects. The flawed designs combine with a risible creative reboot that sees Sonic romancing a human princess and a creepy, realistic Robotnik, resulting in an already unbearable game. The technical problems plunge the game into the crevasse, with numerous bugs suggesting a rushed, half-finished release. Quite frankly, it's an embarrassment to all involved.



SONIC RIVALS 2006

SYSTEM: PSP

Developed by Backbone Entertainment, this portable title adds an element of competition to the classic 2D platforming template of the series, pitting Sonic, Knuckles, Shadow and Silver against each other in one-on-one races. It's a reasonable game, but some flawed level design detracts from the fun. A sequel followed, naturally.



SONIC AND THE SECRET RINGS 2007

SYSTEM: WII

An on-rails platformer with an *Arabian Nights* theme, *Sonic And The Secret Rings* removes the technical issues of other 3D *Sonic* games at the cost of curtailing freedom. A flawed upgrade system severely hampers the game, even requiring you to upgrade control response. A sequel followed, based on Arthurian legends.

MARIO & SONIC AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES 2007

SYSTEM: WII, DS

Sonic finally appears in a game with arch-rival Mario. It's a pretty decent party game, and sold millions despite most Wii owners already having *Wii Sports*. The series has continued as a result of the strong sales.





SONIC CHRONICLES: THE DARK BROTHERHOOD 2008

SYSTEM: DS

■ Plot has never been a particularly strong suit for the *Sonic* series, so the announcement of a *Sonic* RPG was something of a surprise – but bigger still was the surprise that BioWare was to develop it. The young potential audience required a lightweight story and easy progress, but the RPG specialists delivered a decent experience in spite of these shortcomings. This game didn't get a sequel, most likely due to EA's acquisition of BioWare.





SONIC UNLEASHED 2008

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

■ *Sonic*'s disastrous 2006 reboot necessitated a rethink, and *Sonic Unleashed* was the result. The new platforming template showed promise, despite some wonky control and the abundance of bottomless pits. It even dropped non-*Sonic* characters to focus on the hedgehog himself. Unfortunately, Sega seemed to be less than confident about its new direction and saddled the game with a dreadful item-based progression system and the much-derided debut of the Werehog, a monstrous form of Sonic whose stretchy limbs were used for mediocre 3D beat-'em-up sections. It's an improvement on *Sonic The Hedgehog*, but still not a game that we'd actually recommend.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 4: EPISODE I 2010

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

■ Designed to appeal to long-time fans of Sonic's classic Mega Drive outings, this is a 2D platformer that revisits old level archetypes. Unfortunately, it doesn't quite manage to live up to the quality of the games that inspired it. *Sonic The Hedgehog 4: Episode I* is short and highly derivative, with level designs that veer into tribute act territory, and Sonic's physics are bizarre and somewhat broken. *Episode II*, released in 2012, resolved some of the problems seen in the first episode, and reintroduced Tails with some new co-operative moves.





SONIC COLOURS 2010

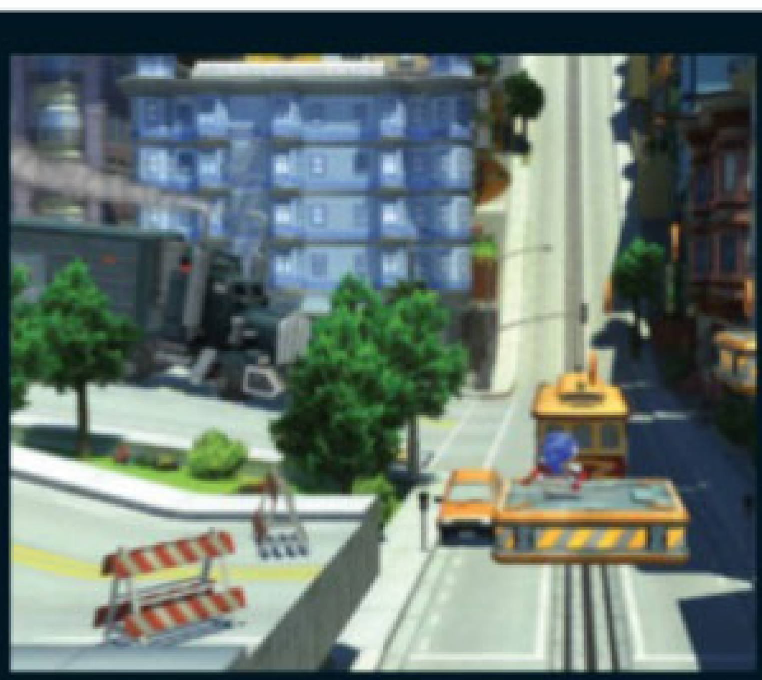
SYSTEM: WII, DS

■ Set in an interstellar theme park, *Sonic Colours* tasks Sonic with rescuing aliens that are being used as a power source. The game utilises the hybrid 2D/3D platforming template introduced in *Sonic Unleashed*, with Sonic gaining a range of new abilities as the aliens – known as Wisps – also function as power-ups. These abilities enabled all kinds of new level designs, making for one of the best *Sonic* games of recent times – a legitimately good platformer in the main series after years of disappointment. It's also one of the most graphically impressive games on the Wii.









SONIC GENERATIONS 2011

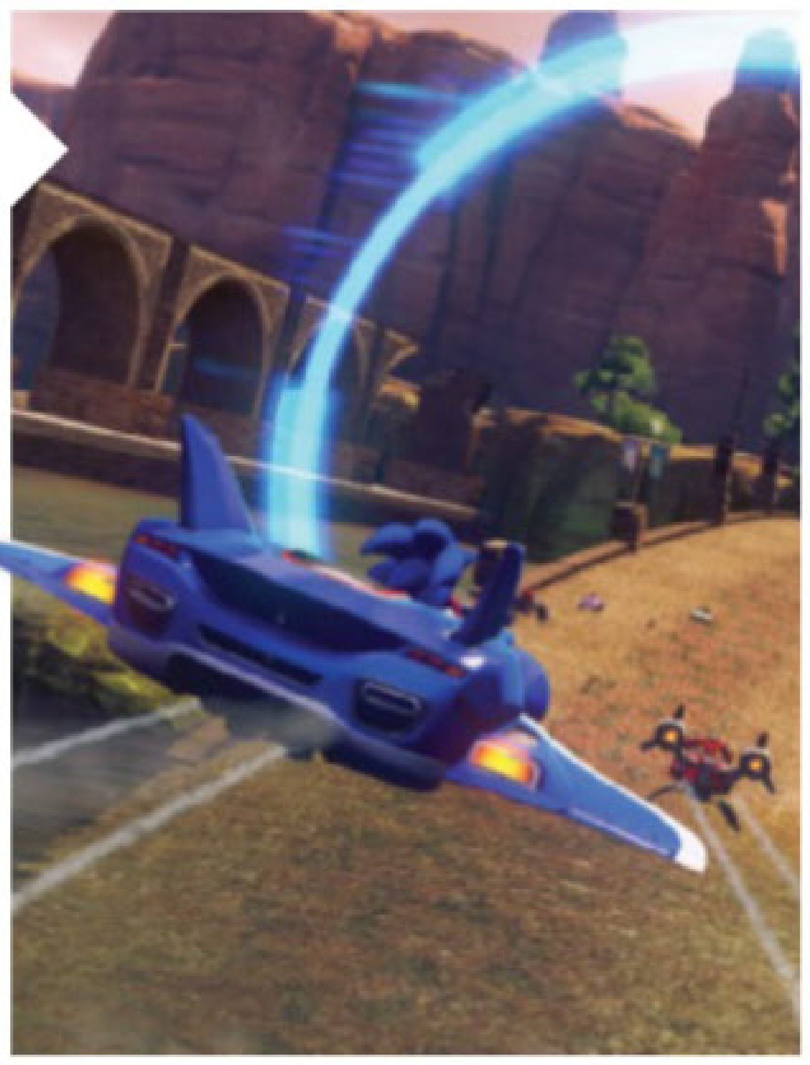
SYSTEM: VARIOUS

■ To celebrate 20 years of the *Sonic* series, Sonic Team devised a time travel plot that sees the shorter, pudgier Sonic of 1991 meeting his modern counterpart and taking on stages from the history of the series. Classic Sonic's stages are all 2D designs, while modern Sonic reprises the *Unleashed*/*Colours* platforming template. The game works very well – the re-imagined versions of Green Hill Zone and Chemical Plant Zone prove thrilling to speed through as modern Sonic, and even the bad games inspire good stages, particularly classic Sonic's version of Crisis City. While it's not nearly perfect – the game is quite short and boss battles are often relatively weak – it's a fitting celebration of the series and a pretty good platform game overall.

SONIC & ALL-STARS RACING TRANSFORMED 2012

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

■ Building on *Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing*, developer Sumo Digital introduced vehicles that can transform to race on land, sea and air. The game is practically a love letter to classic Sega fans, with representation for rarely-seen games like *Skies Of Arcadia* and *Burning Rangers*. With an excellent handling model and deep single-player mode, it's easily the best *Sonic* spin-off yet released.



SONIC LOST WORLD 2013

SYSTEM: WII U, 3DS

Sonic Lost World is a beautiful game, with the bold colours and simple shapes of the Mega Drive era brought into 3D with a minimum of modernisation. For all the negativity surrounding Nintendo's confusingly-launched system, it's very capable of providing the player with pretty and engaging experiences; the issue here is not how it looks but how it plays. The retro visual approach contrasts sharply with the actual gameplay – *Sonic Lost World* is a 3D platformer that takes place across cylindrical stages, making it a bit of a strange one to wrap your head around. The control system has been totally changed, with Sonic's default speed slowed to the point that a run button has been added. Not exactly what you think of when you think of Sonic. Unfortunately, both speeds often prove unsatisfactory, with walking too sluggish and running too imprecise, making it hard to establish any kind of rhythm. Worse yet, the game is prone to massive difficulty spikes. Sonic Team's desire to innovate with the series is commendable, but *Sonic Lost World* just proved too uneven to love.



"SONIC'S DISASTROUS 2006 REBOOT NECESSITATED A RETHINK, AND SONIC UNLEASHED WAS THE RESULT"





AND THE REST…

Everything else that Sonic has starred in

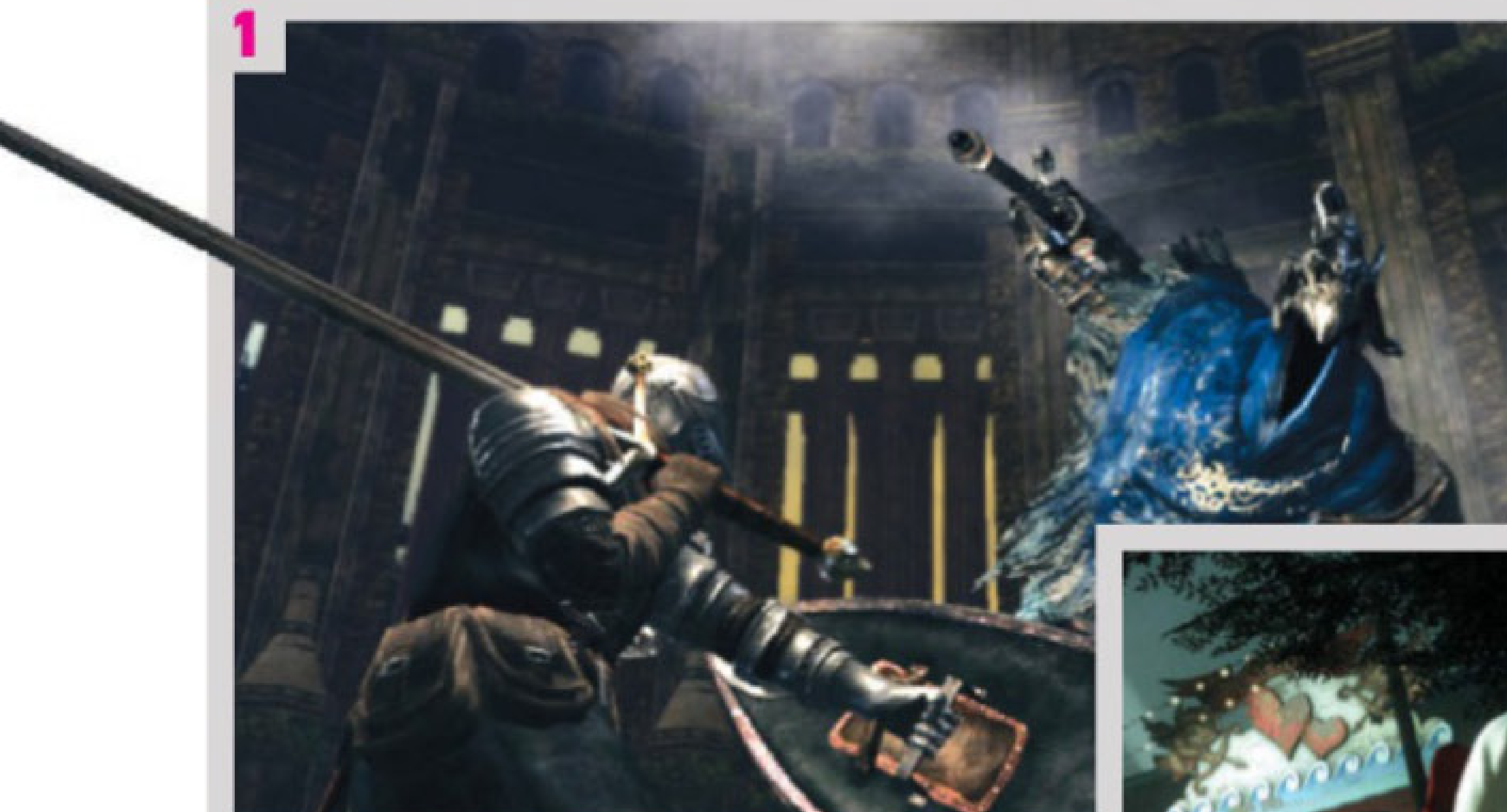
- **SONIC DRIFT** **YEAR:** 1994 **SYSTEM:** GAME GEAR
- **SONIC THE HEDGEHOG'S GAMEWORLD** **YEAR:** 1994 **SYSTEM:** PICO
- **SONIC TRIPLE TROUBLE** **YEAR:** 1994 **SYSTEM:** GAME GEAR
- **SONIC LABYRINTH** **YEAR:** 1995 **SYSTEM:** GAME GEAR
- **SONIC'S SCHOOLHOUSE** **YEAR:** 1996 **SYSTEM:** PC
- **SONIC BLAST** **YEAR:** 1996 **SYSTEM:** MASTER SYSTEM, GAME GEAR
- **SONIC JAM** **YEAR:** 1997 **SYSTEM:** SATURN
- **SONIC ADVANCE 2** **YEAR:** 2002 **SYSTEM:** GAME BOY ADVANCE
- **SONIC MEGA COLLECTION** **YEAR:** 2002 **SYSTEM:** VARIOUS
- **SONIC PINBALL PARTY** **YEAR:** 2003 **SYSTEM:** SONIC PINBALL PARTY
- **SONIC BATTLE** **YEAR:** 2003 **SYSTEM:** GAME BOY ADVANCE
- **SONIC ADVANCE 3** **YEAR:** 2004 **SYSTEM:** GAME BOY ADVANCE
- **SONIC RUSH ADVENTURE** **YEAR:** 2007 **SYSTEM:** DS
- **SONIC RIVALS 2** **YEAR:** 2007 **SYSTEM:** PSP
- **SONIC X** **YEAR:** 2007 **SYSTEM:** LEAPSTER
- **SONIC RIDERS ZERO GRAVITY** **YEAR:** 2008 **SYSTEM:** WII, PLAYSTATION 2
- **SEGA SUPERSTARS TENNIS** **YEAR:** 2008 **SYSTEM:** VARIOUS
- **SONIC AND THE BLACK KNIGHT** **YEAR:** 2009 **SYSTEM:** WII
- **MARIO & SONIC AT THE OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES** **YEAR:** 2009 **SYSTEM:** WII, DS
- **SONIC & SEGA ALL-STARS RACING** **YEAR:** 2010 **SYSTEM:** VARIOUS
- **SONIC FREE RIDERS** **YEAR:** 2010 **SYSTEM:** XBOX 360
- **MARIO & SONIC AT THE LONDON 2012 OLYMPIC GAMES** **YEAR:** 2011 **SYSTEM:** WII, DS
- **SONIC 4: EPISODE II** **YEAR:** 2012 **SYSTEM:** VARIOUS
- **SONIC JUMP** **YEAR:** 2012 **SYSTEM:** IOS, ANDROID
- **SONIC DASH** **YEAR:** 2013 **SYSTEM:** IOS, ANDROID
- **MARIO & SONIC AT THE SOCHI 2014 OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES** **YEAR:** 2013 **SYSTEM:** WII U, 3DS

ESSENTIALS

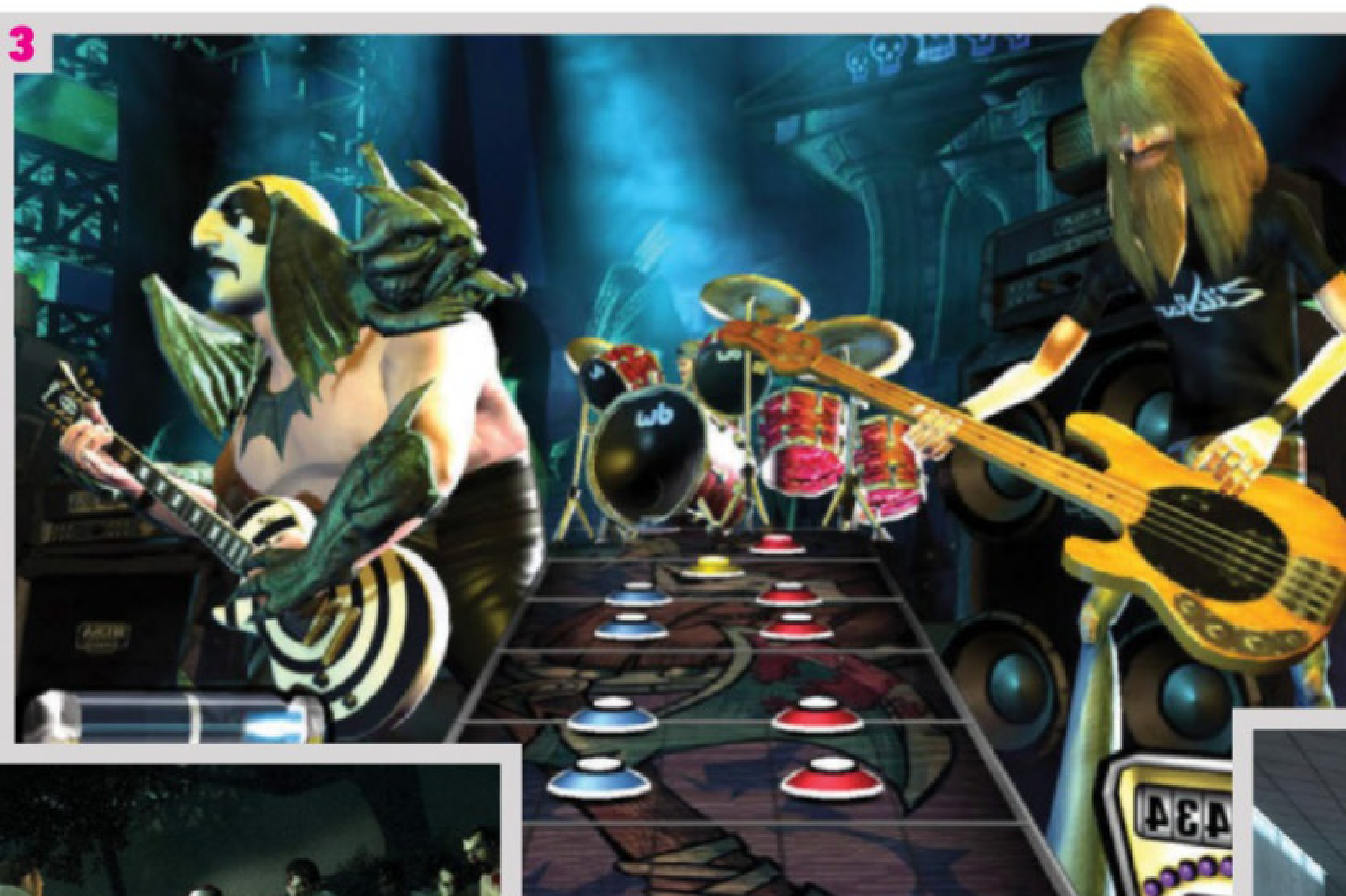
10 GAMES™'S TOP 10 NOT 10S

We've been around for 150 issues, covering 13 years since 2002, and in that time, we've only given 14 games a 10. Many have come close – we usually see at least one 8 or 9 per issue. We thought we'd take this opportunity on our anniversary to go back and consider those games that almost made the grade,. Half-celebration, half-apology, this is **games**™'s Top 10 Not 10s...

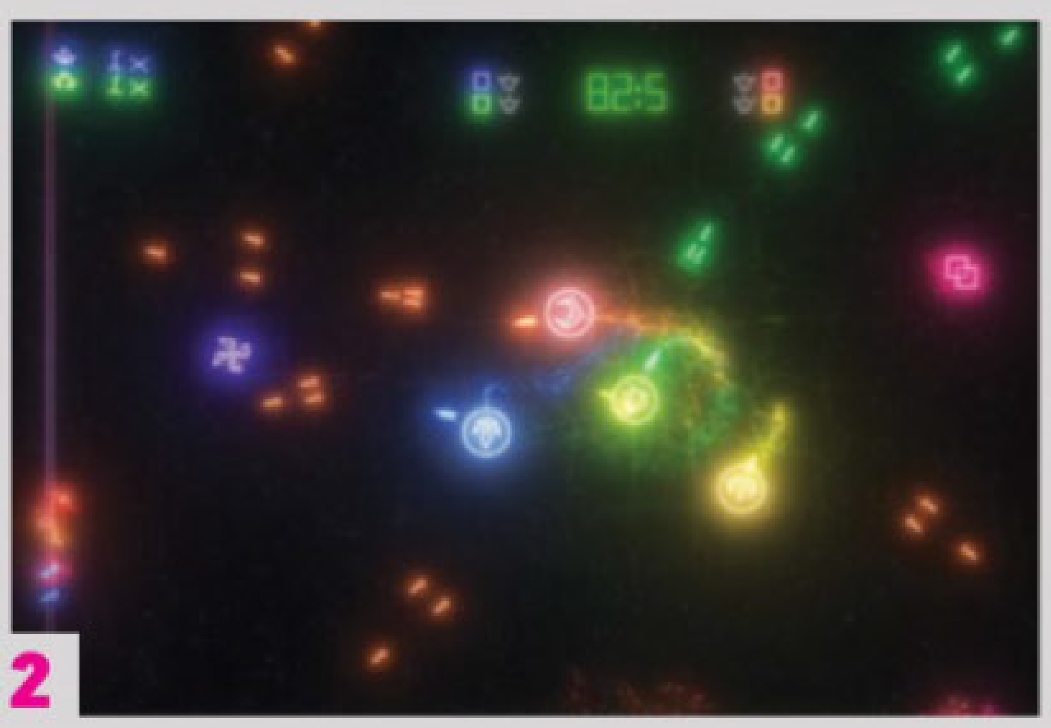
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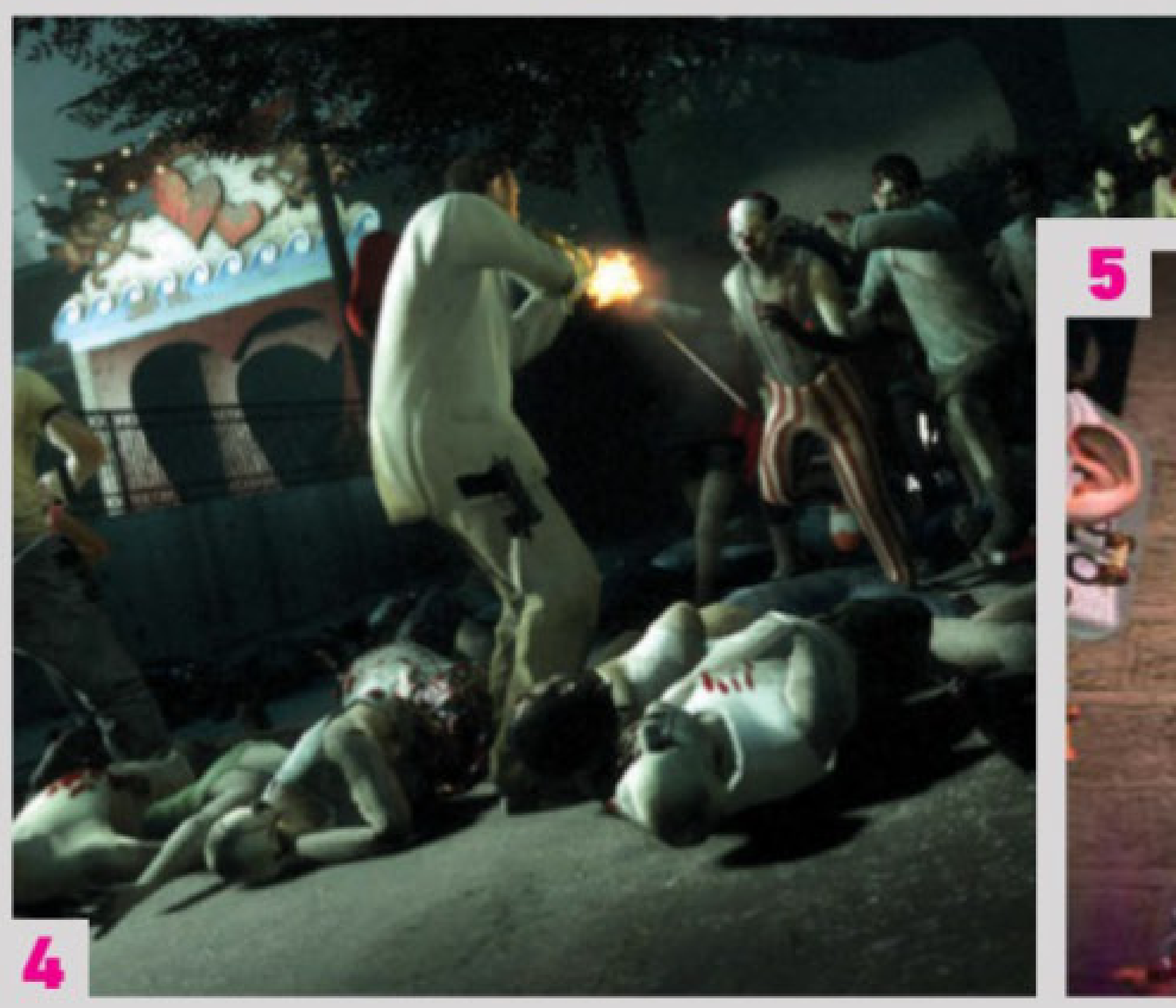
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Dark Souls
From: Issue 114

1 The game that spawned one of the most fervent cult communities in gaming, *Dark Souls* caught our attention for the way it evoked a tangible sense of place, its adept take on the non-linear game, and – quite frankly – its overwhelming hardness. It was a kick up the backside to masochistic gaming, the spiritual successor to the under-rated *Demon Souls*, it launched itself as a wholly new entity, entering the gaming world as a brooding, threatening force. It's gone on to shape the way developers approach insta-death and game balancing, and would have achieved 10 were it not for some clunky handling issues.

Geometry Wars Retro Evolved 2
From: Issue 7

2 When we reviewed *Geometry Wars 2* all that time ago, back in issue 74, we said that each of the game's individual game modes could stand alone as a game in its own right. We still stand by that. It's a tragic shame that Bizarre Creations has since closed down, because we still find ourselves going back to *Geometry Wars 2* when we have a blank moment after we've booted up our 360, and then find ourselves sucked in once again. If it wasn't for the over-saturation of twin-stick shooters at the time, and the emulated mechanics on the game, it probably would have reached that ever desirable 10.

Guitar Hero
From: Issue 40

3 Eras ago, back in issue 40, we called this game the 'finest peripheral-based game ever', and with good reason. *Guitar Hero* completely altered how developers approached both rhythm-action and the peripheral in tandem, igniting a trend that exploded into the mainstream. We still have memories of looking at a wall after playing the game and seeing it seemingly warp towards us, the scrolling bars of the screen distorting our vision (which was probably very dangerous). Could the game have gotten a 10? Yes it could have, yet only if it was *Rock Band*, but made back in 2005.

Left 4 Dead
From: Issue 78

4 *Left 4 Dead*: the zombie-fuelled desperation simulator that takes all the best bits of *Doom* and *Gauntlet*, all the while retaining Valve's penchant for emotive storytelling. *Left 4 Dead* successfully managed to introduce the world to the AI Director, a game-enhancing AI whose influences are still shaping the gaming industry as a whole (Evolve and Turtle Rock are building on its strong foundations). It has set a precedent for co-operative shooters, and had there been a little more content, it would have edged closed to that elusive perfect 10. As it happens, it didn't quite cut the mustard, but here's to trying!

LittleBigPlanet
From: Issue 76

5 'Charming and brilliant, yet deceptively demanding'; that's what we said of *LittleBigPlanet* in issue 76, complimenting the game's flair for creativity and the way it encourages players to build in its sandbox universe. Criticisms came when we wrestled with the editor's awkward interface, though, and the hit-and-miss nature of the platforming the game's main game revolved around. Still, it's a ludicrously fun experience and one that we're happy to see evolving. Forming a gameplay experience around collecting assets to use in level editing is inspired, and we're happy the franchise is still enjoying immense popularity.





7



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What makes a game a 10? Read **games™** **Perfect 10** to find out: tinyurl.com/qfcwchx



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Portal
From: Issue 63

6 We actually reviewed *Portal* as part of the *Orange Box*, to which we gave a 9 collectively way back in issue 63. Innovative in the 3D puzzler realm, and peppered with flourishes of amusing humour, Valve hit upon something special by combining cerebral gameplay, incredible level design along with ground-breaking physics ideas with some of the tightest comic writing we've ever seen in a videogame. Valve proved that it had arrived as a leading developer with the *Orange Box*, with *Portal* highlighting some of the major strengths in the left-field, as well as the main-stream. Perhaps we'd give it a 10 on its own!

Resident Evil 4
From: Issue 29

7 Way back in issue 29, we gave *Resident Evil 4* a 'high 9', bordering closely on 10. We couldn't commit to the full score because – and it's a small complaint – the ammunition was much more plentiful in *Resident Evil 4* than it was in previous games, which seemed to make it a more action-packed affair and taking the emphasis off of the survival element of the game. Still, criticism like that is to be expected in a game that carries a '4' after its name, as it would in a film series or similar. *Resident Evil 4* remains Capcom's finest hour, and a shining point in an already solid series.

Shadow Of The Colossus
From: Issue 39

8 It's rare that a game's soundtrack will be one of the most memorable things you'll walk away thinking about, but that was certainly the case with *Shadow Of The Colossus*. Appearing in issue 39, we were as enamoured with the game's cinematic approach to exploration and the way it made the player examine themselves back then as we still are now. The erratic framerate and awkward camera angles worked against the game, though, but it was easy to forget the foibles when you came up against the colossal creatures. Ultimately it didn't achieve the glorious 10, but it definitely put up a good fight in an attempt.

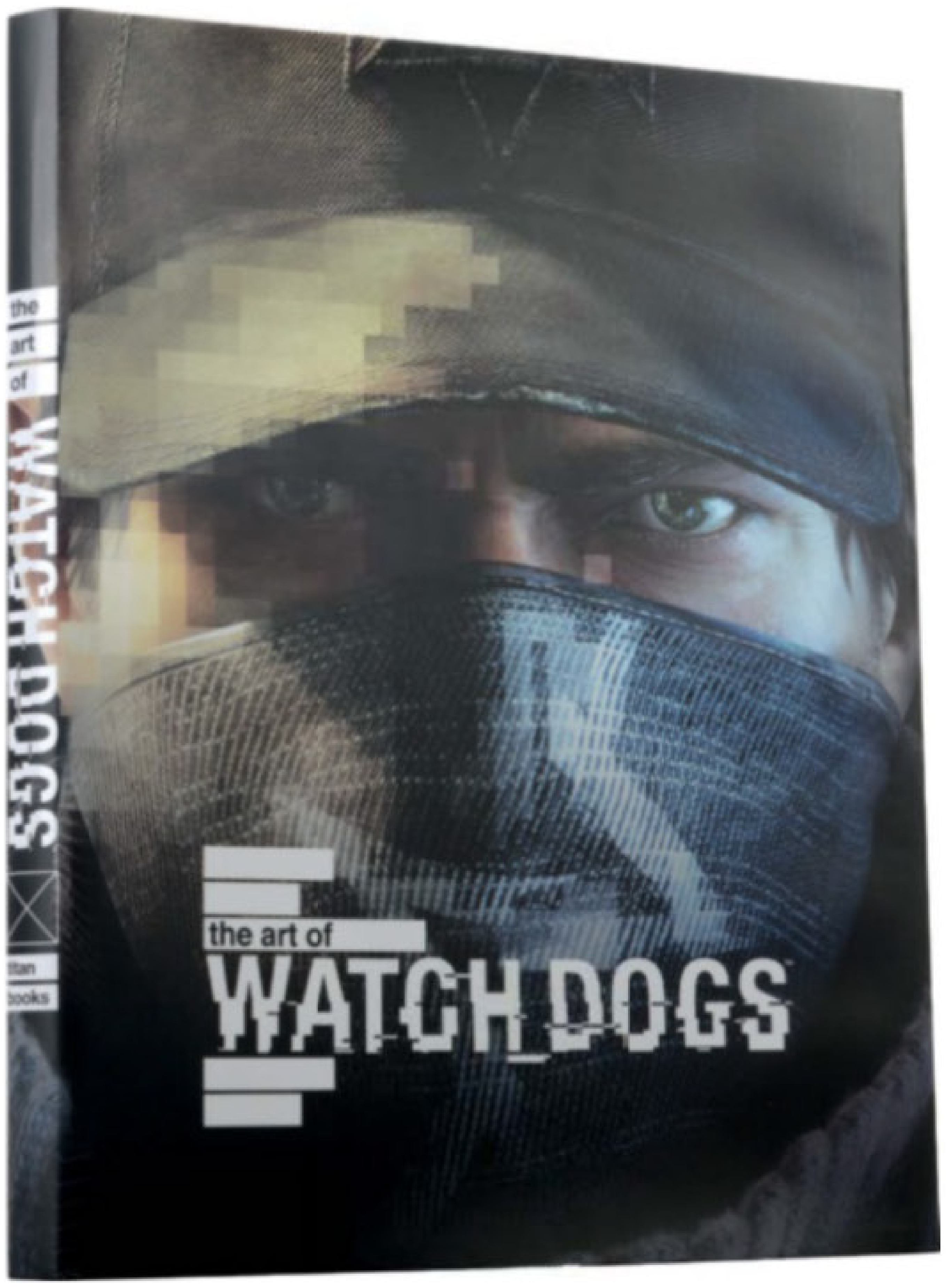
World Of Warcraft
From: Issue 30

9 According to **games™** back in issue 30, *World Of Warcraft* is 'a fantastic foundation for Blizzard to build upon', and we certainly weren't wrong. *World Of Warcraft* went on to be the record-breaking, millions-making MMO behemoth that laid the foundations for almost every single MMO game going forward. We were picky in our review, and our issues with the launch build were addressed in patches almost as soon as we hit publication (and if not, in one of the myriad expansion packs down the line). 'We can see ourselves living in Azeroth for a very long time', we said in 2004. 11 years later, and we are still there.

Super Mario Galaxy
From: Issue 63

10 A lot of hardcore gamers were sceptical of the Wii, regarding it with suspicion and caution, viewing it as a machine for the casual gamer – incapable of outputting 'real' games. *Super Mario Galaxy* was probably the first title to disprove that theory, as we outlined in issue 63. We stated it was a worthy successor to *Super Mario 64*, a revolutionary experience to the 3D platformer, and a resounding statement from Nintendo – that they're still here, and that the Wii is definitely a valid console. The sequel was one of our 14 that earned full marks, but by then *Galaxy* hadn't done quite enough to tip us over the edge.

THE VAULT



THE ART OF WATCH DOGS

PUBLISHER: **TITAN BOOKS** PRICE: **£24.99**

WHETHER YOU BECAME enraptured in Ubisoft's world of *Watch Dogs* or not, there's no questioning the amount of artistry that went into constructing the futuristic vision of Chicago. To coincide with the game's release, Titan Books has released a companion book covering the design of *Watch Dogs* that delves into fascinating detail about the title's development.

It focuses on four main aspects of *Watch Dogs*' design: characters, the city, the digital underground and the technology. With concept art, illustrations and notes that flesh out the world across 144 pages, few art books go into such an intricate amount of detail.

Each of the major characters is given due diligence. We're given an overview as to how protagonist Aiden Pearce evolved into the cardigan-loving hacker that appeared in the game, while Clara, T-Bone and Jodi are also covered significantly.

More impressive is the amount of focus on Chicago itself, peeling back the layers with all the major areas discussed in detail. This section takes up the majority of the book. Delving into both the city's structure, laying out the visual cues and driving forces that contributed to making the world an engaging place to inhabit.

If there's a quibble then it's with 2D sketches, the book instead filled with direct CG design, meaning there's a lack of traditional examples of pre-production videogame art. There's a wealth of information to be found inside, covering several unique facets about the game, while also relishing in the small details.

While it might not be quite as hefty as other art books on the market, few can match it for detail and insight. It not only offers an interesting perspective of the game's development, but also expands the world itself to give a better understanding of the game.



GAMING CLOTHING



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TANOOKI MARIO FIGURE

MANUFACTURER: **FIRST 4 FIGURES** PRICE: **$199.99**

NINTENDO HAS NO shortage of fantastic collectable figurines based on its esteemed history of colourful characters, but we're hard pressed to remember one that looks as good as this. Measuring at a whopping 15 inches tall and limited to 2000 pieces worldwide, Tanooki Mario has Nintendo's portly plumber modelling his fashionable snug-fitting outfit that enables him to fly high above the Mushroom Kingdom. Based on his appearance in *Super Mario 3D Land*, this is the first in a new series of *Super Mario* statues that Nintendo has commissioned. It's not the most affordable of collectable items that we've come across but Nintendo continues to deliver high-quality merchandise that tugs on the nostalgia strings and eclipses its competitors. If the rest of the series continues to look as good as this, we're preparing ourselves for a poor couple of months.

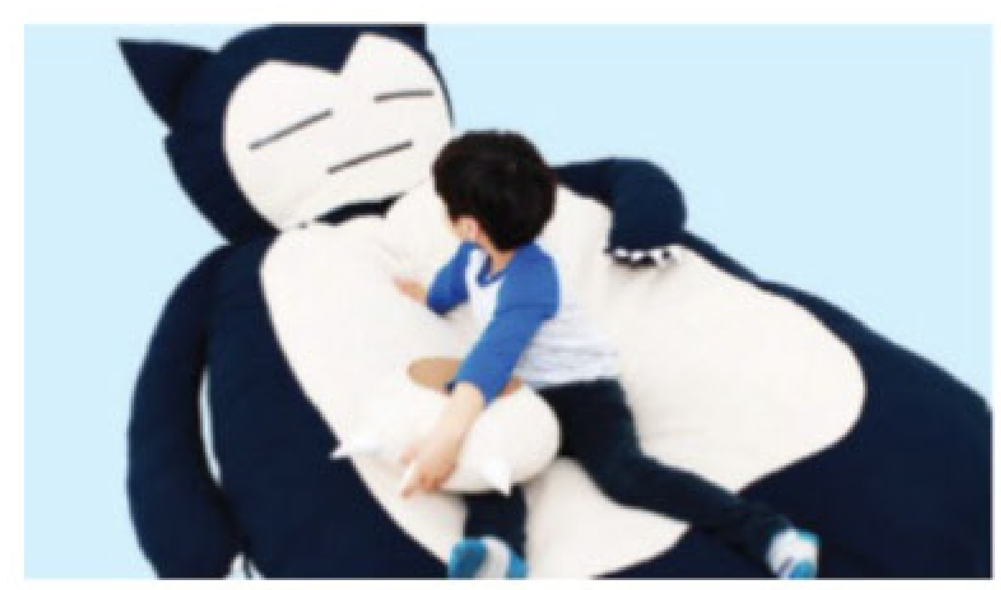




SNORLAX BED

RETAILER: **CATHERINE KIM** PRICE: **£176.42**

If there's anything else that exists in the world that looks more comfortable than this then we simply don't want to know about it. Created by Etsy artist Catherine Kim, this custom Snorlax bed is the stuff that dreams are made of (and, er, the maker of dreams). Featuring the most huggable Pokémon that ever graced the Pokédex, this bed is almost six feet long, so it's for children and short humans. But there's every chance that even normal-sized adults will attempt to curl up on this plush, comfy-looking palace of plush.



ZELDA/MARIO/JOURNEY/MINECRAFT SONGBOOKS

MANUFACTURER: **ALFRED** PRICE: **$14.99-$45.99**

Hey! Listen! A new range of songbooks offer the opportunity to learn how to play classic themes from *Minecraft*, *Journey*, *The Legend Of Zelda* and *Mario* series of videogames, across a range of instruments. While the selection of Nintendo themes are some of the most iconic pieces of music in the medium, both *Minecraft* and *Journey* also offer a suite of emotionally-charged songs of recent years. Both the *Journey* and *Minecraft* songbooks are aimed for piano players, while the *Mario* and *Zelda* series feature both piano and guitar options across multiple skill levels. These songbooks are a must-have for the musical genius hidden within you.



LAST WORDS

Final thoughts from the last person left in the building



ALI HOPE

Creative Assembly

Alien: Isolation director

Simply put: how do you know you're scaring people?
I think the best measure as to whether we are scaring people is to just watch players' reactions to encountering the Alien. We felt, early on, that the best first experience people could have was for them to have a hands-on encounter… to actually play the game. When we watch people play, whether at E3 or other events it's fantastic to see how players quickly become immersed in the world, in the experience. To see them have a physical reaction: to see them moving in their chairs, pushing back into their seat, to hear them start to breathe heavily as the intensity ramps up. And when the Alien confronts them: the exclamations, the swearing and probably best of all the huge smiles that appear on the players' faces upon being killed.

And why do you think people enjoy being scared as part of their gaming habits? Wouldn't it make more sense for them to want to not be scared?
For me, I think it's similar to a rollercoaster – it's the thrill and fear of the unknown. The expectation and anticipation, the out-of-control powerlessness followed by the satisfaction of surviving a stressful encounter and the physical response, and then the adrenaline rush afterwards.

What do you think about the indie scene in regards to horror games? The genre wasn't too popular for a while, now the CA is making a massive, triple-A horror game - is it, at least in part, because of the indie resurgence?
We started making this game many years ago… I don't think the genre has gone away, I think it's evolved. I think you could find really compelling heart-pounding survivor horror experiences in a variety of games of different genres. I do think there's an argument to say that *Minecraft* is the most successful survival horror of the generation. It's a game about an underpowered protagonist struggling to survive, about resource gathering and creepy, dangerous creatures that come out at night. If you come to the game completely cold, the first night in *Minecraft* is terrifying.

Of those indie horror titles, have any of them had an influence on Isolation?
As a team we are big survival horror fans but we I think we find inspiration in a wide spectrum of games and personal experiences. Games like *Limbo* with its incredible soundscape and its unique anti-fanfare approach to death to something like *Gone Home*, which toys brilliantly with the player's expectations. It's not a survival horror game per se, but it feels like one at times.

For me, I think it's similar to a rollercoaster – it's the thrill and fear of the unknown





Weapons aren't relied upon in *Alien: isolation*, but they sure do help. Expect frantic scavenging for parts.

games™

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13 issue subscription UK – £52.00
13 issue subscription Europe – £70.00
13 issue subscription ROW – £80.00

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Printed by Wyndeham Heron Ltd, Bentalls Complex, Colchester Road, Heybridge, Maldon, Essex, CM9 4NW
☎ 01621 877 777
Distributed in the UK, Eire & the Rest of the World by Marketforce, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London, SE1 0SU ☎ 0203 148 3300
www.marketforce.co.uk
Distributed in Australia by Network Services (a division of Bauer Media Group), Level 21 Civic Tower, 66-68 Goulburn Street, Sydney, New South Wales 2000, Australia
☎ +61 2 8667 5288

ISSN 1478-5889

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